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Master of illusion: *Magic Marc shows off his skills.*

the real Magic of Marc

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HE'S NOT SOME CARD-TRICKIN', WAND-WAVIN' BACKDOOR MAGICIAN: HE'S MAGIC MARC, THE MOST FUN A KID CAN HAVE IN A HOSPITAL.

WRITTEN BY HEATHER THOMPSON GRANT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM JOHNSON & DAVID STROHL

Though his step is brisk, his emotions are drained. Not because he's leaving an auditorium of thousands as he once did when he opened for Bill Cosby and Aretha Franklin—and performed at private parties for Oprah—but rather because he has just left a hospital room. Marc Dunston, better known as Magic Marc, traded the celebrity life to bring healing to children who have forgotten how to smile. And he has no regrets.

With his bag of tricks and contagious exuberance, Marc makes his way to two very special, private shows. Despite the vibrant colors in his signature patchwork vest and the underwater art that decorates the hallways around him, the reality is that Marc is at Backus Children's Hospital at Memorial Health University Medical Center.

Marc enters the room of 6-year-old Garrison Blocker. With his mother and grandmother at his side, this precocious young boy runs to greet Marc at the door, asking almost immediately, "Where's your rabbit?"

Diagnosed with autism when he was only 4, Garrison can be a little tough to understand; otherwise, he appears to be the picture of health. But doctors recently told Garrison and his family that he has diabetes, so he has spent the last few days in the hospital practicing injections on his stuffed animals and even making his own mom an honorary patient.

Marc begins by showing Garrison his empty hands, rolling up his shirtsleeves for added effect. Then magically, a bright orange handkerchief appears in his right hand then in his left hand and just as quickly is gone from sight. Marc then begins to cough as if choking on something and points for Garrison to help him out. Sure enough, Gar-

Fun House

Magic Marc and his wife, Kyrin, plan to break ground on Dunston Market at Bluffton Station in Bluffton, South Carolina, within the year. Envisioned as an activities center for families, Dunston Market will house toy stores, an ice cream parlor and a fully functioning studio where Marc will record magic shows in front of live audiences.

rison begins to pull the orange cloth from Marc's mouth and laughs as the handkerchief turns into a seemingly endless chain of colorful paper. The longer it gets, the more Garrison laughs, until the whole room is grinning from ear to ear.

"You know you can achieve anything you want if you just believe and practice," Marc tells Garrison. "I always say: Practice makes perfect." Marc then presents Garrison with a children's book—a book Marc wrote about his own childhood—gives him a hug and a smile, says goodbye, and heads to his next performance.

"That's the key," Marc says after the show. "Grab their attention, make it fun and then they'll be ready to learn and grow and think beyond their current circumstances."

After just one hospital room performance, it becomes clear that though his trade may be magic, his job is to make children—and anyone lucky enough to know him—smile.

Since the young age of 6, Magic Marc (a name he laughingly notes he coined before Magic Johnson's fame) has been using his magic to entertain audiences around the world. His inspiration came from the 1953 movie *Houdini;* after that, his "practice makes perfect" philosophy shifted into high gear as this self-taught magician began learning the tricks of the magic trade. "Thanks to my parents, teachers and family, I learned at a very young age that the secret to life is giving whenever you can—time, talent, treasure—just give," Marc says with fervent sincerity.

Marc performed his first magic show in his Philadelphia elementary school's talent competition, with hopes of winning the $25 grand prize. While his classmates planned how they would spend the winnings on themselves, Marc had a better idea. The father of his neighbor had lost his job, and Marc realized the family wouldn't have a turkey for Thanksgiving dinner. After Marc won the talent show, he performed what he refers to as the best magic trick of all: "I made a turkey appear on their Thanksgiving table that year," Marc joyfully recalls, demonstrating not only his natural talents as a magician but the birth of his lifelong commitment to giving.

"If we can teach our kids to think about others and do for others, that's one of the best lessons they'll ever learn," says Marc.

At the hospital, Marc's next eager audience member is Owen McAndrew. At just 9 years old, Owen sits in his hospital bed with a patch covering his left ear and his family at his side. What began as an ear infection spread to the mastoid, a projection of bone behind the ear, and ultimately formed an abscess between the mastoid and Owen's brain. Owen already underwent one surgery to reduce the infection.

Even under these circumstances, Marc enters the room as if arriving for a birthday celebration. Then once again, with the greatest of ease, Marc begins his magic, getting the entire family involved and completely winning over everyone in the room. In the showstopper trick, Owen waves Marc's magic wand and makes a small red ball magically appear in his mother's hands. The little boy, whose face was wrought with sadness just moments earlier, laughs and smiles uncontrollably.

When asked what this means to her, Owen's mother, Fallon, is immediately brought to tears. "It means the world to know that for even five minutes, he doesn't have to think about being sick," she says, adding, "I haven't seen him smile this much in a long time."

Just outside Owen's room, a hospital staff member asks if Marc can sign a copy of his book, *The Magic of Giving,* and put it in the makeshift mailbox hanging on a patient's door. "This little girl wanted to see you so badly, but she can't risk having visitors right now," she explains. Marc, careful to spell the little girl's name exactly right, gladly signs a copy of the book and leaves it for her.

To see Marc perform is to witness a true inner joy, which naturally makes those around him instantly happy as well. Even when doing magic shows for children who have little reason to smile, Marc's charm is irresistible.

His life could have taken a very different turn. He performed hundreds of shows for A-listers across the country—including Spike Lee, Patti Labelle and pro sports teams, to name a few—but gave it all up to devote his talent to children. He genuinely shies away from boasting about his celebrity past, preferring to focus on the personal and, at times, emotional side of what he does. Marc explains, "God didn't bless me so I could brag."

But while his humbleness runs deep, his emotions are refreshingly worn on his sleeve, especially when recalling a special child who deeply touched his life. "I remember one time, and I don't think I even told my wife about this one, but I met this boy at a school performance: One of his parents was in prison, the other was gone, so this young man was living with his grandmother. And all he wanted was to play basketball, but he didn't have any shoes. The

other kids laughed at him, taking for granted the shoes on their own feet. So I bought him a pair, and do you know he went on to become the best player on his team," Marc says, tears forming in his eyes. "I will always remember that."

It's no surprise that Marc recalls that story as one of the more touching he's experienced. Of the many lessons he teaches children with every performance, he firmly believes one of the most important is learning to walk in someone else's shoes. "I've gone to schools and talked with kids who are struggling academically and then realize they haven't had anything to eat all day," says Marc in disbelief. "How is a child supposed to concentrate when he's hungry? If we can just try to understand someone's situation and help them instead of laughing at or condemning them, just think of the difference we could make."

Marc is the executive producer and host of *The Magic Marc Show,* which airs Saturday mornings on WTOC. He also just inked a deal to write 12 more children's books. In addition, he performs dozens of out-of-town shows as well as performs at local hospitals and schools. It's easy to assume he has no time for anything else. But amazingly, Marc also is actively involved in Camp Sunshine (an annual camp for children battling terminal illnesses), is a volunteer with both the Diabetes Association and Cancer Society, is president of the board at his church—and the list goes on. But even with his many accomplishments, he is always working towards that next big thing. "I don't ever want to stop," Marc declares. "I want this to be the No. 1 TV show. That's the goal: to reach as many children as possible and make a huge difference.

"Everything we do is based on the idea of magication," says Marc, referring to the unique combination of magic and education that he incorporates into every performance. "Learning really is fun, and if we make it fun for our kids, there's no end to what they can achieve."

Sitting in the hospital lobby, Marc is lovingly greeted by nearly everyone that passes by, and though his smile is sincere, it's obvious that his thoughts are still with the children upstairs. "They're the reason I do this," Marc says simply. "To make children smile, despite everything you can imagine they're going through: It just doesn't get any better than that."

Then, the only magic secret he reveals: "You want to make something instantly appear? Just smile at someone and see what happens."

Read All About It

The Magic of Giving

AUTHOR:
"Magic" Marc Dunston

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THE MAGIC MARC SHOW AIRS ON SATURDAYS AT 7:30 A.M. ON WTOC. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MAGIC MARC, CHECK OUT MAGICATION.COM

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