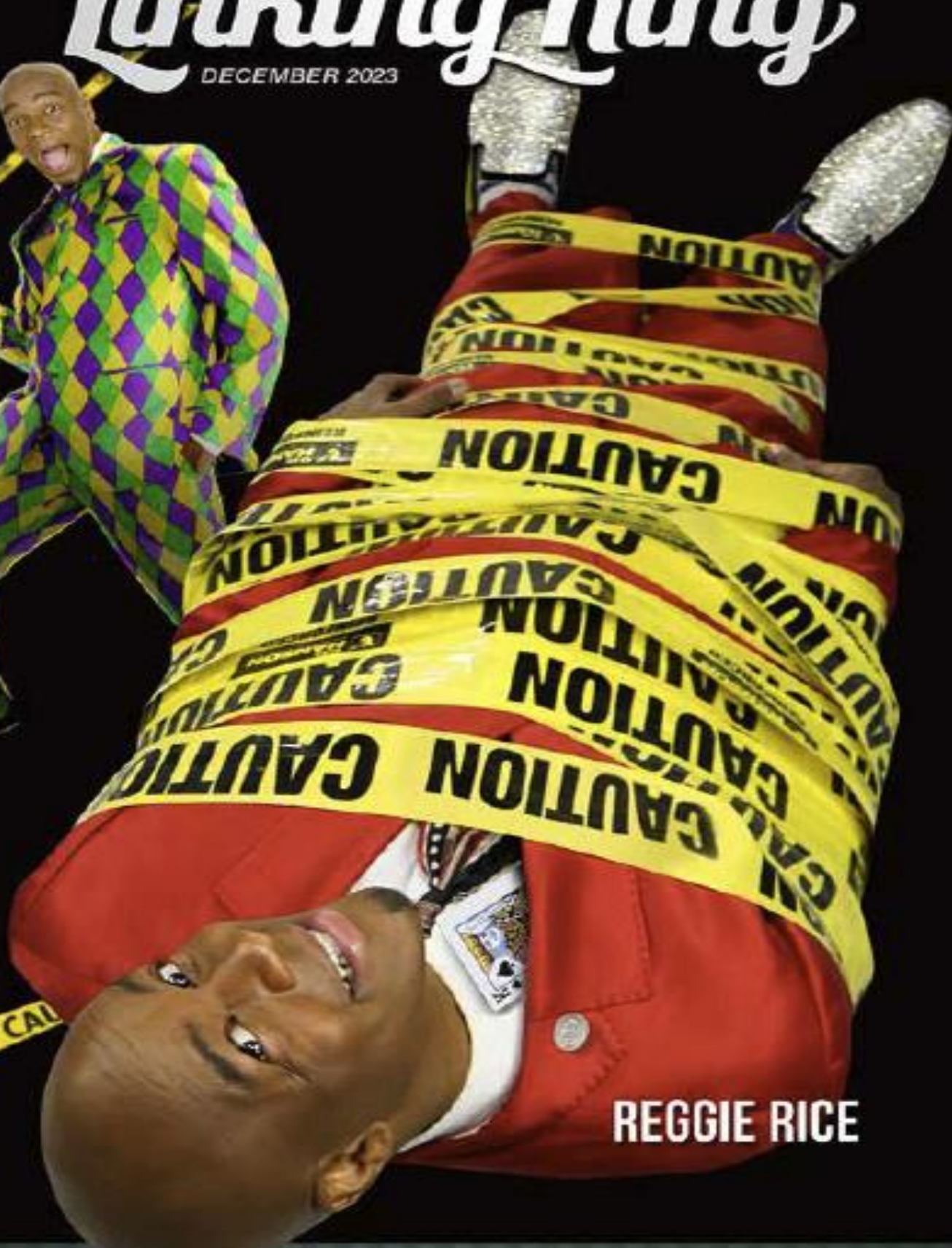


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The Linking Ring

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REGGIE RICE

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COMEDY ILLUSIONIST

Healing the World One Laugh at a Time

By Larry Lipman

It's a long way from Southern Maryland to a cruise ship off the coast of Alaska. Or Chile. Or Portugal. But those are just a few of the stops along Reggie Rice's recent magical journey.

Reggie was born at Roosevelt Roads Naval Station, Puerto Rico. Both of his parents were serving in the Air Force. His father served twenty-three years in uniform – most of the time in the military police – and another thirteen as a civilian working as a budget analyst for the Department of Defense before his death in 2012. His mother, a native of Puerto Rico, served five years in the Air Force. In civilian life, she worked for Wal-Mart in the cash office and as manager for more than twenty years. A dedicated Jehovah's Witness, her religion prevented her from attending Reggie's shows. But Reggie said she never stopped loving and supporting her son as he followed his dream.

The love of both parents, Reggie said, had a profound impact on him and they were a huge force behind his life and drive for success.

Reggie was the third of his parents' four children – two older brothers and a younger sister. He also has three older half-sisters.

When Reggie was about three months old, the family moved to St. Mary's County, Maryland, a largely rural area less than an hour from Washington, D.C.

Even at a young age, Reggie was entertaining.

"I was talkative. I was hyper. I was a class clown. It was always fun for me," he recalled. In elementary school, Reggie volunteered to play the role of the Flying Purple People Eater during a concert.

"During the performance, my eyeball fell off the costume and it rolled down the



Reggie delights the crowd with his magic and comedy at the 2023 I.B.M. Annual Convention
PHOTO BY MICHAEL MESSING.



Reggie Rice. PHOTO BY KATHY HOLLYER

stage. And I remember everybody kind of gasping like, ‘Oh, no, this is devastating him.’ I remember picking the eyeball up and just kind of playing around; holding it in my hand, it was funny. And then the audience started laughing and clapping. And then, obviously, I couldn’t put it back on.”

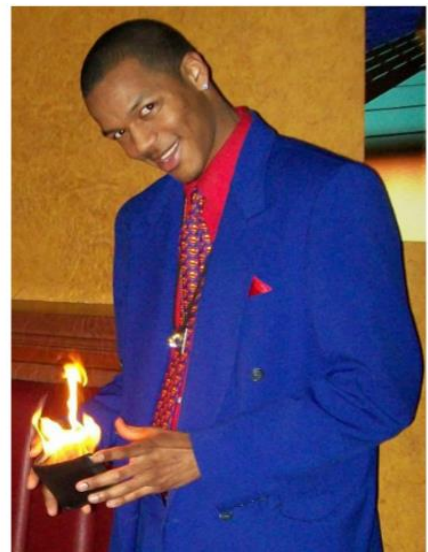
It was a pivotal moment for young Reggie.

“The more laughter I got, the more outrageous I got. It was like, ‘Oh, yeah, this is working. They liked this.’ I don’t know

if I really grasped it at a young age, but it’s like, you can get attention in a positive way by being funny. And everybody will like you and talk about it. So I think that sparked the comedy version of my entertainment.”

Two young Black entertainers had a tremendous influence on Reggie as he was growing up: Eddie Murphy and Michael Jackson.

Reggie has always been a huge movie fan and says he can quote movies he hasn’t seen in twenty years almost verbatim.



Left to Right: Reggie Rice on the air at Fox 45 Baltimore. The fire wallet was one of Reggie’s bits when working at restaurants to pay the bills.

Eddie Murphy, in his *Beverly Hills Cop* roles, had a big influence on Reggie's view of humor.

But his biggest influence was Michael Jackson. Reggie remembers how he and his brothers would watch a Michael Jackson music video and then rehearse it in their basement and perform it for their parents.

It's not a coincidence that Reggie will often wear costumes that mimic Michael Jackson's style, such as broad shoulders and epaulettes.

"I like Michael's obviously over-the-top look," Reggie said. "That's my gold standard and goal as an entertainer. There was a time, when I started doing stage magic, I had a Michael Jackson routine. I performed it years ago at I.B.M. Ring 50. I did a manipulation act entirely to Michael Jackson's [songs] 'Dangerous' and 'Thriller.' There are always Michael Jackson songs in my shows to this day."

It wasn't just Michael Jackson's songs that inspired Reggie, who recalled how Jackson defied the music norms of his day to record and produce the music video "Thriller" – which is more than thirteen minutes long.

"People were like, 'Oh, you're not gonna do a music video that long.' And he did. I always think about and take that into consideration whenever I'm doing my performances, or putting my show together. Put the show together that you want in your head and make it your own. I always consider myself as someone who is an entertainer – who uses magic to tell his stories – not just a magician."

In middle school, Reggie sang in and emceed the talent shows. Soon, with a friend who was already into magic, Reggie began incorporating a few small magic tricks into his role as emcee. Reggie continued being involved in theater at Great Mills High School, usually emceeding the talent shows and participating in school plays.

While in high school, Reggie began working at Wal-Mart. He took two years of



Performing for Kevin Hart for his World Tour at a meet-and-greet.

Tech Center in high school in the field of carpentry, and got a job working for a construction company after graduating. When he was nineteen, Reggie began working at Hyperspace Fun Center, a family entertainment center that held, among other activities, children's birthday parties.

The center brought in a consultant, Frank Price, owner of "Birthday University," who taught the staff how to entertain at birthday parties.

"They gave everybody a box and it had a magic coloring book. It had a thumb tip. It had a hot rod. And it had a small little fuzzy gizmo on a string, and some balloons with the pump," Reggie recalled. "So that was my first magic kit. And I started performing those in birthday parties."

"I did the hot rod when I was working at the rock wall one day and a kid loved it so much that the dad gave me five bucks. So the next day, I brought in two tricks to work and that was literally the start of the magic. I thought, 'Okay, I can make some lunch money doing this.' A few months later, I was performing magic in birthday parties. And then I convinced the owner that I needed more stuff because I was getting requested for magic shows. So we started ordering magic tricks off of the Magic Warehouse and Denny and Lee in Baltimore. And that's the start of the magic part of performing at birthday parties."

Although the Hyperspace Fun Center has closed, its owner, Kathy Hollyer,

would play a pivotal role in Reggie's journey into magic.

In the early 2000s, Hollyer took Reggie and some other managers to a food convention in Ocean City, Maryland. While walking around the convention floor, Reggie came upon corporate magician Giovanni Livera.

"I didn't know, at the time, that I was talking to a living legend in magic that had previously won the Gold Cups in close-up and stage. But I stopped perusing the trade floor with my Hyperspace crew looking for food, and just stayed at the magic booth and watched Giovanni perform his different effects over and over. In between his segments, I would talk to him and ask him questions. He was the one who first told me about the International Brotherhood of Magicians, and he told me they meet in a different city every year and have a convention and you should look into going and checking it out."

When Hollyer and another manager talked to Livera, they told him that Reggie was also a magician. Livera asked what kind of magic Reggie performed.

"It was like, 'I do a coloring book, a thumb tip.' It was so embarrassing, and I don't get embarrassed. He was so gracious."

Reggie sheepishly recalled that he was so unfamiliar with how to be tactful that he asked Livera how much he made. Livera

didn't respond directly. Instead, he noted that he'd been performing at the same convention for eleven years and the first year he made several thousand dollars.

"That was the light bulb moment. I was like, 'Oh, I can make a living doing this.'"

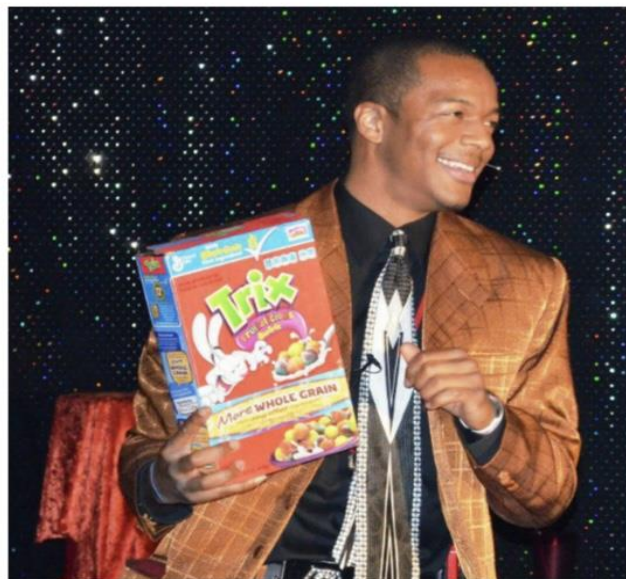
Reggie had always had his goal set on being an actor, but he thought magic might be a different way into the entertainment business. After meeting Livera, Reggie and Hollyer looked into the I.B.M. In 2004, Hollyer took Reggie and her then fourteen-year-old son, as well as another manager and her son, to the I.B.M. Convention in Cleveland.

It would change Reggie's life.

Although Reggie was older than the age limit for the youth track, he and the two younger boys participated in the youth track where they were exposed to top magicians from around the world. Reggie said that first convention taught him many valuable lessons on how to navigate in the magic community. Two magicians in particular took Reggie under their wing that year, and introduced him to many of the working pros.

Reggie said he would "forever be in debt" to Tom Vorjohan and Daniel Herron (The Balloon Guys) and remember them as his first magical mentors and friends.

"That whole week's experience really showed me how things are supposed to be done when it comes to the ethics of magic,



Left to Right: Reggie with his "first box of tricks." Reggie and his first co-star, Lucky.



With heart transplant patient Collins Boyd.

and that magicians always dress like they're going somewhere better later."

Reggie liked the sound of that and has made it his lasting theme to always be the best-dressed person in the room. Or – thanks to Jeff McBride – at least the most outlandish.

"I don't think I can tell you more than one trick I learned that entire convention. But those things I will never forget."

Seeing large-scale grand illusionists perform live on stage fired Reggie's imagination and introduced him to a world he didn't know existed.

"Meeting so many of the magicians I saw on *World's Greatest Magic* while growing up – these guys became my heroes and I wanted to do what they were doing."

Reggie got the Mark Wilson magic course book from friend Brandon Dement, which gave some instructions on building larger illusions. After looking into the cost of buying illusions, even used, Reggie quickly concluded that was out of his price range at the time. But with his background in carpentry, Reggie was convinced he could build his own.

Because he is dyslexic, it was difficult for him to learn just by reading texts. Now he refers to his dyslexia as a "super power," that taught him to be a good visual

learner. Reggie said he could visualize how to reverse engineer some of the effects he saw on television. At one point, he recorded episodes from the TV show *The Masked Magician* and would watch them over and over – sometimes frame by frame – trying to figure out how they were made.

"I became a self-taught illusion builder by necessity," he said.

Two of the first illusions he built were a metamorphosis and a dollhouse, one of which he still uses in his shows.

Not all of the projects were a success. Reggie remembers some were "truly horrible," including one involving black art that was so poorly done the audience had no idea that a magic trick was performed.

"Lessons learned," Reggie said.

Hollyer, through Hyperspace Fun Center, would invest in his magic by purchasing more props for the birthday party shows he did there.

After returning from the convention, Reggie convinced Hollyer to put on a large illusion show at his alma mater, Great Mills High School. Reggie found an inexpensive-appearing motorcycle for sale for \$500 on a magic auction website. It was more money than Reggie ever considered spending on one trick.

Meanwhile, more people were requesting him for parties. He began wearing a Superman cape and Hollyer came up with the name the Super Magic Man, the stage name he would go by for the first part of his career.

Reggie quoted Hollyer as saying that "When he performs, it's like he soars to the audience, creating laughter and memories to last a lifetime."

With Hyperspace's permission, Reggie started doing paid birthday parties at people's houses. "My name started to get around and it started to turn into a business."

Hollyer rented a theater in Great Mills, Maryland, in 2005, and Reggie performed his first big illusion show.

In 2019, two decades after graduating, Reggie returned to do a magic show



Reggie with his first magic crew, Abo Raum and James Hollyer.

at Great Mills High School, after a student shot and killed one girl and wounded another student there before being killed by authorities. Reggie said his purpose in doing the show was to “inspire and bring the magic of laughter to the students and community in this difficult time.” He said he realized that magic and laughter could provide people who were hurting with a bit of happiness.

In 2022, Reggie returned again to do two shows during lunchtime in an effort to “inspire, motivate, and pass on” what he has learned in a show he calls his Success Show.

Attending his second I.B.M. Convention, this time in Miami, Reggie went to a lecture by illusionist Kevin Spencer. “That was a monumental moment, because I learned what it really meant to be an illusionist.”

Spencer has since become a friend and helped Reggie transition from birthday performer to a full-time illusionist, providing valuable insight into the world of booking theaters.

Shortly afterward, Reggie attended the St. Mary’s County Fair in Maryland where an older magician had been performing for about thirty years. Reggie and that magician talked, and – remembering what he learned from the I.B.M. Convention about ethics – Reggie explained that he wanted to start doing illusion shows at the fair and would like to pitch the fair for a show that

would not conflict with the other magician’s style. The magician encouraged him to do so and, in 2005, Reggie began performing at the St. Mary’s County Fair. He still performs there annually.

After his convention experience, Reggie began attending meetings of Ring 50, which met near the waterfront in Washington, D.C. and later in Northern Virginia.

Making friends and mentors quickly, he met magicians including Eric Henning, Michael Taggart, Buddy Smith, Dwight Redman, and former I.B.M. International President Bob Patterson. Among the people who befriended him in the early days of his membership were Bill and Becky Wells. Bill Wells is a former Ring 50 president and a former I.B.M. International President. Years later, at a World Magic Seminar in Las Vegas, Becky Wells arranged for Reggie to come backstage after a gala show with some of the world’s top magicians including Siegfried and Roy, Mark Wilson and Nani Darnell, Criss Angel, Mac King, Penn Gillette, and Lance Burton.

“It was an amazing moment in my career that I had gotten to be a part of history that I would never have been part of without their kindness and them investing in me,” Reggie said. “I remember leaving that room and thinking, ‘No one is going to believe this just happened.’”

In 2007, Reggie competed in – and won – Ring 50’s first Comedy Magician contest. He won it again in 2008 and 2012.

About that time, Reggie met another southern Maryland magician, Brian Garner, who lived about forty minutes away. They’ve been best friends ever since.

Brian introduced Reggie to Joe Romano, a prolific school magician working out of the Washington, D.C. area. Reggie and Joe became friends and Reggie began working for Joe at Six Flags in Bowie, Maryland.

“Joe became my illusionist mentor,” he said. “I learned more from Joe, working with him at Six Flags and just being around him and talking to him on the

phone, than I have from almost anyone else in my career.

“It wasn’t just his magic. It was his professionalism and likability on stage. His insight to magic changed how I did business and showed me you could make a really good living if you treated your magic like a business. I still bug him to this day, and he’s always teaching me something new.”

Up until then, Reggie was an improvisational performer. One year, Romano asked Reggie to fill in for him at Six Flags. “It made me learn the importance of having a script and adhering to blocking on stage, particularly when others were helping with the professional cues.”

Since 2005, Reggie has done about fifty illusion shows at local theaters and has helped raise tens of thousands of dollars for non-profit organizations while perfecting his craft. “I started off with one or two illusions that I built myself, to now where I have an hour-and-a-half show with about fifteen to twenty different major illusions.”

Reggie has set his sights on one day being hired to perform a full evening illusion show at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Another “big picture goal” is to someday travel with his full evening illusion show and possibly even land a TV special.

Lately, Reggie has spent much of his time traveling and performing magic on cruise ships. Reggie remembers attending a lecture by past International President Shawn Farquhar at the Dallas I.B.M. Convention, which introduced him to the possibility of performing on cruise ships. Although the life of a cruise ship magician might seem glamorous and enticing, Farquhar also addressed the reality of traveling for long hours all over the world, being away from family for extended periods, and always being “on” around the passengers.

Reggie said he was both discouraged and enthralled. He saw it as a way to live



Childhood family photo: Micky, Vicky, Ricky, Sergio, Reggie, and Shavsha Rice.

out another dream while doing something he loved.

“Was it going to be hard? Yes. But I knew I was up to the task,” Reggie said. “I remember getting more excited and thinking ‘This sounds great.’”

Later, Reggie enrolled in Gigs on Ships, a course on cruise ship performing produced by Fred and Bobbie Becker.

“Their course was the best money I have ever spent in my entire career,” Reggie said. “The training that was involved catapulted me from being someone who was interested in cruising to having all the knowledge and resources to pursue that in the next couple of years.”

It was a long and sometimes frustrating process for Reggie to gather the performance videos needed to approach an agent to get on cruise ships. In late 2019, just before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Reggie received his first contract. It was to perform on a Holland America ship in February 2020. But on Christmas Eve 2019, he got a call from his agent asking if he could be in Hawaii the day after Christmas to fill in for a magician who had suffered a mishap.



With Skylar Hepner, performing Jill in the Box – Reggie’s version of the Floating Box.

Because it was his first cruise ship performance, the Star Princess Line agreed to allow him to perform only one forty-five-minute show instead of the usual two. He performed the day he arrived on the ship. The show went so well that the cruise director added another show for later on the trip.

Reggie later performed on two more ships, both in the Caribbean, before the pandemic shut down the cruises. Since the pandemic has waned, Reggie has performed on cruise ships off the coast of Alaska, Chile, Panama, and the Azores.

Among the highlights of his career, Reggie lists his performances at Children’s National Hospital in Washington, D.C. as part of visits from then-First Lady Michelle Obama. He also performed for celebrities including Kevin Hart, Ryan Seacrest, and Shaquille O’Neal.

About a dozen years ago, Reggie started doing magic at Children’s Hospital – first as a volunteer, and then as a paid gig about once or twice a month. Reggie was there in December 2011 when Michelle Obama came to read to the children, a tradition

that dated back to Bess Truman in the early 1950s.

Waiting for the First Lady to finish her visits to patients in their rooms, the crowd was getting restless. Reggie had already performed for almost two hours due to delays. A child asked him to do a back flip. Dressed in his suit, Reggie did a standing back flip just as Obama arrived. Reggie, who was also doing emcee duties, said: “That’s enough for me, here’s the First Lady.”

Because of his performance, Reggie was requested a year later by the First Lady’s office to come back to the hospital when Michelle Obama visited again. Determined to get a photo with the First Lady that he could use for promotional purposes, Reggie was allowed to be the last person in the line for a photo. While waiting, a woman approached him with her young daughter, who had Down syndrome. The mother informed Reggie the girl had enjoyed his performance so much she wanted to meet him. To the mother’s surprise, the girl reached out to Reggie to hold her. Reggie remembered the mother starting to cry and saying, “Thank you, she never goes to anyone like that.”

That’s when Obama spotted Reggie holding the young girl. She came over and asked if the girl was his daughter. Reggie said no, and the little girl then asked for her mother, leaving Reggie conversing with the First Lady. Reggie said that little girl was one of his guardian angels because, without her, Obama might have left before he could get a picture with her.

Obama’s staff told her that Reggie had been the emcee and performer before her arrival and she thanked him for a job well done. Reggie got his photo with Michelle Obama holding one of his promotional million-dollar bills.

“It was such a powerful moment in my life. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought doing magic would allow me to meet the First Lady of the United States,” Reggie said.

With exposure he got from Michelle Obama, Reggie made sure he was the last person in line so he would have time to perform some magic for one of his comedy heroes: Kevin Hart.

Reggie paid to attend a VIP meet-and-greet reception with Hart when the actor appeared in Washington, D.C. in 2018. When he met Hart, Reggie pulled out a flaming wallet. Hart was impressed and asked Reggie what else he could do. Reggie performed a sponge ball routine and made sure the staff photographer got a picture.

A similar story happened when Reggie met Shaquille O’Neal at his restaurant in Las Vegas. By now, Reggie had learned the best way to seize these opportunities and share his gifts with people he looked up to.

The most recent jewel in Reggie’s crown was headlining the gala show at the I.B.M. Convention in Pittsburgh earlier this year.

“That was a big milestone for me. I felt I was a good performer by this time, but I didn’t feel I was good enough to headline at a magic convention just yet. I didn’t think of myself as a magician’s magician.”

Regardless, Reggie approached his now-friend Shawn Farquhar and asked to be entered into the vetting process for potential performers at the annual convention.

Reggie said Farquhar told him that he had plenty of friends asking to perform and he only hired the ones who would be positive ambassadors for magic and great additions to the convention.

“I started to realize that, over the years, I have gone from the standard illusions



Reggie’s Washer and Dryer illusion, based on Back Stage, shown here in performance with Joelle Sherman.



Reggie Rice with former First Lady Michelle Obama at Children’s National Hospital in Washington, D.C.

to turning them into my own story. Every illusion I do has its own twist and story to it. Coming from a theater background, I always wanted my show to be a theatrical production that uses magic to tell the story. To my surprise, this formula was a huge success at the convention that started my career.”

An example of the personal twist is an illusion Reggie calls “The Transporter,” a production effect that he built from an old convection oven that he found in a junkyard.

“Performing at the I.B.M. Convention was one of the biggest, proudest moments in my career, because my favorite illusionist, and some of my favorite magicians of all time were in the audience, and my favorite illusion builder – Jim Steinmeyer – was also in the audience.”

Reggie said that after the show, Steinmeyer chatted with him and compared him to Doug Henning “in a very positive way, which was mind blowing, considering he worked with Doug Henning.”

Adele Friel Rhindress, Harry Blackstone’s “Elusive Moth,” complimented Reggie on his metamorphosis routine after the show. According to Reggie, she said that it was one of the best she’d seen, which brought tears to Reggie’s eyes.

Also after the show, Lance Burton “complimented me on my act and said he was very proud, which meant a lot.”



Reggie's original illusion, "Transporter" – with Skylar Hepner and Jaida Howard.

Jeff McBride, whom Reggie met when he attended his first convention in Cleveland and "who has been a mentor and a friend from day one; who helped me on my cruise ship act and has helped me every step of the way, said he was very proud of me.

"It was such a full circle experience. There were so many people in the audience who were friends and mentors along the way," Reggie said. "It was truly..." Reggie's words trailed off. "I'm speechless. I have never been that before."

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Reggie's crew from his *Fool of Illusions* show. Left to right: Sergio Rice, Melissa Rice, Skylar Hepner, Jen Sizemore, Joelle Sherman, Reggie Rice, Kathy Hollyer, Andy Felicitas, Michael Greenlee, Angie Trevino, and Walter Jackson.

Where does Reggie's career go from here? He has several goals including taking his *Fool of Illusion* show and performing around the world. He hopes to be on *Penn & Teller: Fool Us*, *Master of Illusions*, or *America's Got Talent* in the future and be invited to perform at the Magic Castle. And one day, on the big screen.

Another goal: Be featured on the cover of *The Linking Ring*. Check that one off.

Reggie said his biggest goal in life is to show the world that anyone can overcome many obstacles, "and that you have to fight to succeed and for your dreams.

"I want to inspire, not only my fellow magicians, but everyone, that we can make a difference in people's lives by spreading the magic of laughter while making the world a better place," he said.

"This article, in some ways, is a love letter to all of the people that have contributed to my career thus far. I plan to pay them back by continuing to succeed in life, but also by paying it forward."

Reggie said he wants to heal the world one show at a time and that he does that by starting with himself – by working on the man in the mirror.

"That's how you have a Rice day!"