



# Puppet Patter

The Official Publication of the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild

A Quarterly Publication

June 2020

## A CPG Homework Assignment

*by Mel Biske*

Our guild currently has a membership of thirty-five, all who have a common interest in the art of puppetry at various levels. Some support the art, some are novices willing to learn more, some hobbyists, some amateurs, and some professionals. Up until the end of 2019, the current board had been actively organizing various activities to involve a wide array of members to gather at various locations for performances, workshops as well as other social gatherings. Because of the wide range of members home locations, not all could participate. Transportation availability was also an issue. Due to the current pandemic, no plans can be made “until further notice.” However, we can stay in touch with activities that involve all members via email. We see names pop up on Facebook from a few members making comments on current events but not much in the line of puppetry related subjects. In following the request to stay home, wear a mask in public, keep a six-foot social distance etc., etc., news coverage began reporting about what everyone was doing to fill the time now available. Some ideas were creative, some people took to taking on projects that had been put off too long, Spring cleaning took on priorities, plus more solutions came into play. We here at the Patter office were seeking news and information about what was “goin’ on” in the CPG puppet world. We thought, “Not much of anything.” Not true! We spoke with a few members, got some good vibes, and decided to contact the entire membership to see what they were doing to fill the time on their hands. So, we thought back to those days in elementary school, when we returned from Summer vacation; It was our assignment to write a composition about what we did. On May 1st we emailed the entire membership an assignment to write a composition about “What I Did On My Corona-virus Vacation”. The results appear in this issue of the Patter. We thank those of you who responded, recognizing the effort to create a comradery among CPG guild members. You all get an “A+ on your “composition””.



# What We Are Doing While on Our Coronavirus Vacation

by Marilyn, Fred and Ryder Putz

Things have been rather quiet in the Putz household during the virus lockdown. Marilyn has been very busy looking up recipes that would bring some variation into our otherwise very quiet lives. She goes out, well masked and shrouded, to the grocery store to find items that will fit into her recipes. She is a happy shopper. And I must admit that eating at the Putz house is great fun! With the arrival of spring, Marilyn is also engaged with her garden and her war with the dandelions. She has also found time to wash the kitchen walls. She seems to be in great shape.

Our dog, Ryder (big 11 year old Irish setter) has enjoyed having us at home all day and night. He spends his days and nights going from one end of the couch to the other, looking for the perfect comfort spot. He also expects that he will periodically be allowed to run into the ravine on the east side of our property and chase whatever living critters happen to be there when he arrives. He runs full speed through the water and mud. If we don't let him go out, he will sneak in between us and the screen door, push the door open and run full speed, forcing his way out. He spends only about 15 minutes in the ravine and then he returns, soggy and muddy with a smile on his face.

During our breakfast, lunch and dinner times we sit in the kitchen looking out the windows watching the birds moving to and from the feeders to the bird bath. A new species of bird causes great excitement and we race to get the bird book before we forget the bird's markings. Another bit of entertainment we see through the kitchen windows is the comings and goings of our neighbor and the three girls and three boys (or more) whom she transported from Haiti to live with her. We are sure that she is renting rooms to the kids so that they can attend American schools. (Not exactly a legal operation.)

Then there is Fred who has been facing some health problems. A recent auto accident caused a blood blister to form in his left leg which is already affected by lymphedema. He has spent some days in the hospital and now has a home care visiting nurse who changes his bandages three times a week. He finds walking difficult and uses a cane or a walker to get about the house as well as for going other places. He is also spending time struggling with our income tax preparation and catching up with life outside on the computer.

Our best entertainment consists of reading, talking and watching Stephen Colbert at 10:30 PM, waiting to see what he will have to say about the President's latest blunders.



Well, ttttthat's all for now.  
Marilyn, Fred and Ryder Putz

# Jill's CoronaVirus "Vacation"

by Jill Fredrickson

I hope this finds all of my CPG family well.

I have been not doing much with my time away from the world. I have my studio space in a mixed use building in Racine, with Wisconsin "Safer at Home" I have not been able to use that space since March 15th as puppetry is not classified as an essential business. I possibly could have gone in to sew masks, but no one seems to want fake fur and fleece masks. I am hopeful about getting back in there in May as restrictions ease and the Wisconsin curve stays flattish.

I have been reading, doing puzzles, taking long walks, learning Spanish online, snuggling the cats, cooking and cleaning, and drawing sometimes. When I was a kid, my summer vacation stories never thrilled my teachers, we didn't do anything then either.



# Time to Re-Connect

by Nitsana Lazerus

This Corona time has been joyful to me. I am staying with my daughter and family and my 4 granddaughters keep me busy. The twins are 4 months old and I love seeing them develop day by day. With the 3 and 6 years old I have made a few simple puppets...They are creative and full of energy. Wishing everyone safe and creative "vacation". Nitsana



# TikTok. TikTok. TikTok.

by David Quesal

My Puppets are my passion and my "therapy" to get me through the days. Any way I share my puppets on social media makes me happy. YouTube videos have been a great way to keep productive and develop my characters in between live appearances. Normally, the family would be at school or work and I'd be able to film my puppets' footage, upload it to my computer, do all the editing and post-production and have a YouTube video online with no problems. With the Quarantine, I am now busy being a dad and husband every waking moment that I'm not at my essential job.



I have still been able to find moments to take pictures with my puppets for social media, but I was still not happy that my YouTube video making had to be "on hold." Fortunately, like many other people during this pandemic, I learned how to use the social media app known as TikTok. This app has helped me greatly. It supplies short and fun audio clips for users to lip sync or dance to. People have been using it to be silly, creative, show off their talents and even collaborate with each other with great ease. I was very lucky to get the hang of TikTok. Now I can quickly and easily make short videos with my puppets and even "duet" with other performers at nearly any given moment. I definitely have to thank TikTok and the new friends I've made on TikTok for giving me this new creative outlet to help me cope with these hard times.



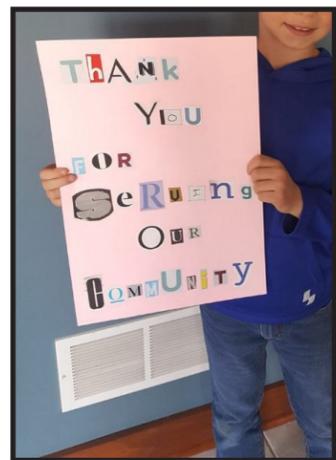
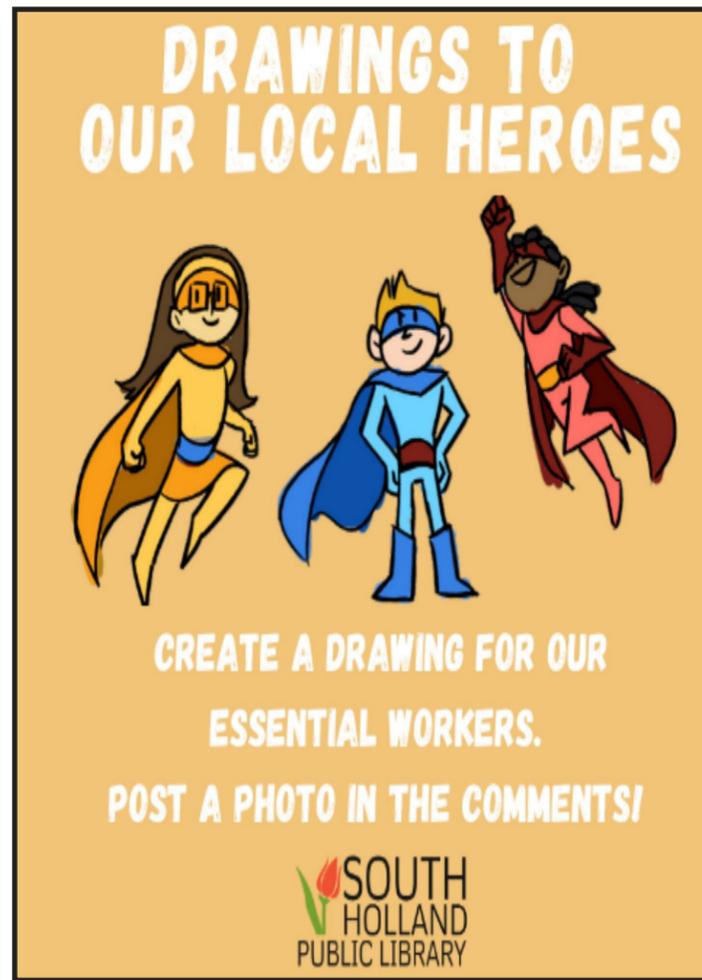
# What I did on my Corona-virus

## "Vacation"

by Susan Fulcher

On my Corona-virus "vacation," I had fun doing two puppet projects. The first project was to make finger puppet patterns and give them away to Children's Librarians. Since the libraries were closed due to COVID-19 many librarians had to start doing their story-time online either on Facebook live, YouTube live, or to record a video and post it either on Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram. I thought this would be a great opportunity to talk about the littlest puppets and how they could be used with online story-times. I created YouTube videos showing how I used them during my library's online story-time. I felt great when I saw this comment to one of my finger puppet videos, "This is a great idea! Thanks so much for posting this. I've never felt comfortable using finger puppets but this is something I think I can handle!"

The second project was a tribute to our essential workers. My business, Suzette's Puppets, partnered with the South Holland Public Library to give thanks to the essential workers. The librarian posted the following on their Facebook page, "Calling all Kids and Teens! Show Support for our local Essential Workers. Create a drawing in support and post a picture in the comments below. The first 25 people to participate will receive a prize kit thanks to Suzette's Puppets. Happy Drawing!!!" The prize kit was a gingerbread superhero puppet that they could put together themselves. The kit included a blank puppet, a cape, a mask with eyes, a jelly belly circle and a mini bottle of tacky glue. Talk about priceless.



# Career Changes During the Pandemic

by Dave Herzog

Even as we entered March 2020 things were going along pretty well for me, the Summer shows were close to sold out, Steven Wideman had asked me to help he and Connor Asher on a project to help build six life size horse puppets for a production of The Virginian with Life Line Theater Company, and I was also teaching classes at the Matteson Public Library along with Susan Fulcher as part of our Jr. Puppeteers club. Plans were still on to go to Seattle Washington to honor Marc Dunworth at The Northwest Puppetry Center where his "At the Circus" marionettes were part of display of historical Circus marionettes, and I was busy in my own workshop building a couple of new things for the Summer and refurbishing other puppets, not to mention performing several times a week

As things started to go from bad to worse in Seattle Tim and Rose Dunworth very wisely decided it was best for us all to stay home, the time line of the horse project started to slip, and all classes were cancelled as the Matteson Public Library closed it's doors to the public. My last public performance took place on March 12<sup>th</sup>, ironically in my home town of Dixon, IL at the library where I first discovered puppetry books, and in site of the grammar school where I saw my first marionette show. By Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup> the cancellations started coming in wiping out all of the spring shows, and it became increasingly evident that we were all headed for trouble. By the end of March we were sheltering in place, and it became evident to live performance puppeteers that there would be no Summer season this year, except by possibly live streaming our shows to clients, an option I for one do not favor at all.

For my own sanity it became necessary to hunker down in my workshop and plan for the future. At 65 I am simply not ready to retire, but now in late April 2020 it is becoming apparent that I will probably not be able to perform live for children again until an effective vaccine for the virus is available. So, the question becomes what do I do with my time? I have found that it is best to continue with a plan for creating new puppets, refurbishing old ones so they are totally ready to



perform with when this is all over, and in general keep my skills honed. On the bright side I have so far completed a new puppet called Ethel the Gooney Bird for my show Stars on Strings. This act is a tribute to Marc Dunworth's Agnes the Gooney bird which I helped choreograph. I had started the puppet in late February before things looked bad. I have designed and built a roller-skating baby puppet named Da Baby, who I hope



will create a new opening bit for my show. After a two day break to rearrange clean and totally purge my workshop, I started work on a polar bear version of my Teddy Bear Picnic number for my Snow Show production. This actually entailed using the body of my Frosty the Snowman puppet, re-furring it and adding a new head for



the teddy polar bear. Fortunately, I did have some neoprene rubber on hand, and plenty of white fake fur. Unfortunately, I ran out of plastic wood and epoxy sculpt so the polar bear teddy is hanging headless in my workshop while I await delivery of new supplies. My next projected projects will be a new totally re-designed Frosty the Snowman puppet, and the refurbishment of my entire cast of The Furry Follies show. I'm also working on sculpting a George Washington head in the style of my friend Guy Thompson's Punch and Judy puppets which he will use when his show plays Mt. Vernon each year.

Like everyone else I've had some bad days, and it is often very hard to concentrate for long periods of time.

I find audio books help with this. I have found it does help to try to get up and get going everyday, and keep to some sort of schedule. It also helps to give myself a “mental health” day once a week. Usually on Saturday I just do as I please. This often involves a whole lot of Netflix and Amazon Prime. After a mental health day, I’m ready to go again.

It was becoming evident to me in the last couple of years that due to some health issues, and the fact that by mid 60’s the equipment isn’t getting any lighter, I would have to start slowing down and make some adjustments to my career in my Senior years. I have to believe when it comes to this pandemic that this too shall pass, and I will perform again. How long until it’s safe again, I don’t know, but when it does come time to retire, it’s damn well going to be my decision, not because of the Corona Virus. Stay safe! Stay healthy! Stay strong, and above all continue to create puppetry.

P.S.: New materials have arrived since I started writing this article a week ago and the new polar bear teddy bear marionette is now complete!



## My Corona-Vacation

by Terry Reimer

Thank you for inviting us to write for CPG! I really appreciate your keeping it going! YOU are even MORE DEAR, now. I’ve been thinking of doing more puppet shows and have many planned, but can’t seem to do much of anything just yet! I’m recently retired, but ALL this time feels like not enough! I enjoy having projects “on the back burner” too, so I feel like I won’t run out of things to do over these months of “waiting”. I dream, draw, clean, read, play percussion and visit on Zoom to keep up with most of my “group” activities... I wonder if everyone will make art and shows about covid19?!

I really enjoy playing with my Wonder Cat, Timmy Be Timba! This photo was from last summer, in the back yard we share at my apartment in East Lakeview. This summer he’ll stay safe inside. Some of the neighbors enjoy exercising in the yard. I wait until they’ve gone inside, to go out. I’m the Gardener and Maintenance Assistant at my building. Though the Head Maintenance Man



goes around to many other buildings with a mask and gloves, I may just get up enough courage to buy a few flowers and veggies for the yard, and garden. Spring is beautiful now! I especially enjoy having a fire pit in the evenings. Earth, Air, Fire, Water... I drive to walk with my best friend, who lives near a huge park, since it’s so crowded around here.

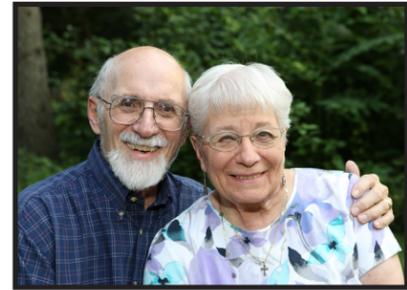
I’m a Gemini, so I love people! My sister’s a Taurus, so she’s loving being alone! I have many friends and family I’m staying in close touch with. Timba lets me HUG him tight! “Togetherness” seems to be such a Human quality that we take for granted. When this is all over, I’ll have a HUGE party and everyone will DANCE and TALK and EAT and HUG for days!!! Hope to see you all sooner! Thank you SO much for all you do with CPG!

Much respect, Terry Reimer  
World Puppet Riot



## What We Are Doing on Our Corona Vacation

by Mel and LaVerne Biske



As we were accustomed to and always looked forward to regular visits from members of our family, which included our own children and their families, it suddenly came to an end. Now only essential trips are allowed. The home-made chocolate chip cookies in the cookie jar sat full. To keep in touch, our daughter, Jennifer, set us up with an unused cell phone and programmed



it with the phone numbers of our children and spouses, grandchildren, and great grandchildren so we could contact them and them to use “face talk”. Our son, Jeff, made arrangements with our 6 families and organized a Zoom chat so we could all “get together” at the same time. So, on a Sunday afternoon at 3 pm, we started chatting and had a family update. It was great to see the family together again but, something was missing: Another member of our family - puppet family that is. Our dog, Woofer! Couldn’t do a whole show but he would be able to do a guest appearance. We got the attention of the kids and called for Woofer to come out. He popped up with a “woof” and put his head on the table. He did a couple of his corny jokes and got the laughs he deserved and “hightailed” it out.

We do manage to get out on sunny days for assisted walks near our home with a few family members in tow and, of course, we all wear the masks. Our landscaper son, Neal tends to the lawn and outside maintenance, son Jeff and daughter-in-law Sandy do the weekly shopping, and daughter Jennifer (who operates her own hair salon called “Hair We Go”) drops in for haircuts on a regular schedule. Another bonus is, all three pop in from time to time to surprise us with favorite home cooked meals. Yum! Yum!

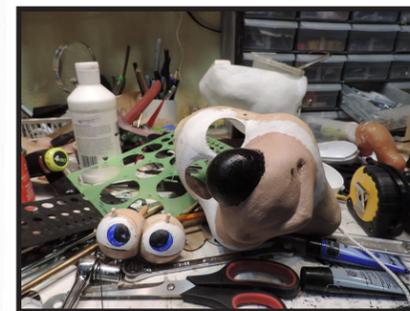
We do have a well-stocked library of home videos, a collection of our favorite movies we enjoy watching, and tons of pictures going back over 63 years bringing back some wonderful memories. Filling our time? With daily household chores, laundry, meals to prepare and so on. Some days there just isn’t enough time. To quote our “Shoe Maker”, (in a yawn), “So much to do, and so little time to do it in.”

Stay well and healthy  
Mel and LaVerne

## Getting Caught-Up

by Joe Emory

A project that has been sitting in a box for about 4 years now. Feels nice spending some time in the studio and seeing the floor for the first time in a long time.



# How We Spent Our Corona Vacation

by Jeff Biske

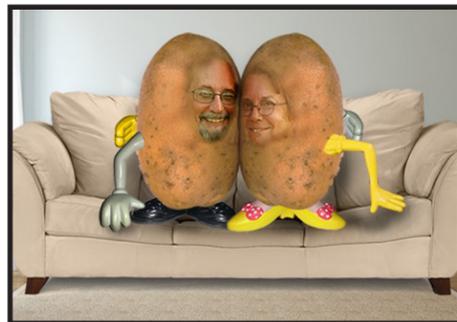
They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Well, here's a few thousand word about how Sandy and I have been spending our "quality time" together.



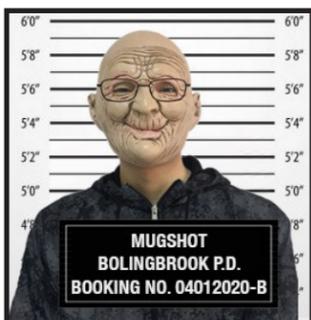
Guardin' our stash of T.P.



Making sure the birds are safe and fed.



Binge watching stuff. Maybe a bit too much.



Occasional trips to the bank while wearing a mask. Not a good idea.



Weekly shopping trips for us, my folks, and a few neighbors.



Working on really hard puzzles. This one took three days.



Our attempt at home hair care.



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# Caring Arts: Making Puppets with Ellen

by Mel Biske



That is the headline that caught my eye. Could it be the same Ellen who is a caricature artist? Mural artist? Caricature puppet maker? I read on; "I have been conducting craft workshops at various health facilities and hospitals for cancer patients through the Caring Arts Foundation. Due to the current circumstances, we are creating public online DIY workshops to create fun projects at home. Here is my first video in making a sock puppet." Yes! It is the same talented artist, Ellen Lustig, sharing her talents in time of need.

We have known Ellen as a long-time member of the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild and the Puppeteers of America. In reviewing our membership list, we see that we have a number of guild members who are well acquainted with her work and her amazing qualifications in each field of endeavor. For some of our newer members, we would like to introduce you to, Ellen Lustig.



Her roots are in the Northern suburb of Highland Park, Illinois. So much like other artists, their talents are recognized at an early age. We asked Ellen how and when her artistic talents were discovered and she replied, "My mother tells me that I used to occupy hours of time coloring as soon as I could pick up a crayon". Ellen added, "As far back as elementary school. I realized I had talent when I was in kindergarten. My teacher asked the class to paint a clown. She then posted the results above the blackboard. I looked at the paintings and realized that my clown painting was the only one that resembled a clown, the rest I considered scribble scrabble." She recalls drawing caricatures of her teachers as far back as third grade. Her interest grew to the point when she was encouraged to take private painting classes at the age of ten.

After graduation from elementary and high school she began drawing caricatures professionally at the age of sixteen. In addition to private parties, she would entertain as a caricaturist at corporate events and other functions. Seeking a formal art education, she investigated schools that would best offer the advancement of her talents. Over a period of four years, she was enrolled at the California

College of Arts, San Francisco, the College of Arts and Science at Syracuse, University, The Art Institute of San Francisco and to top it all, The School of the Chicago Art Institute.

The next step, fresh out of college and art school, was to seek employment where she could make use of her artistic abilities. She found employment with a whiskey bottling company making ceramic prototypes for collectable whiskey decanters. The company also branched out to making decals for their products and she created and set up the art work. After a short time with a work overload and not being properly compensated for overtime, Ellen reasoned that since she had the capability to work that hard and now had a discipline to do so she would be better off working for herself, by creating things that she loved. She became independent and self-employed.

She entered a new chapter to her art form and became a ceramic sculptor for nine years, creating giant food sculptures and sold them in top galleries around the country. She grew tired of creating similar objects. Her life evolved, ever re-creating herself, and decided to launch a "Mural Company". Already having a client



base, it was an immediate success! With that addition to her repertoire, and as a result, approximately 10 years ago, she made a proposal to create hand puppets for a synagogue school in Glencoe, Illinois. She added to that, the caricature puppets of celebrities which became a culmination of her sculpture, painting, caricature and sewing. She created a web site and proceed to take commissions for custom made puppets.





Ever evolving and exploring new computer age technology Ellen's latest venture is creating a digital multimedia installation comprised of animation, her own music score and digitally designed acrylic sculptures that appear in 3D. She has continued her original caricature business and now her drawings are both traditional and digital caricatures. They are popular at trade shows, corporate events and weddings.

Now, with all those facets of art in play, one might ask Ellen, "So what do you do in your spare time?" She would reply, "In my free time, I work on my own paintings and have created several different series of them over the years. I also perform 'Blues keyboard' at a few jam sessions, including Kingston Mines in Chicago and the Wooden Nickel in Highwood."

**(Editors note:** For detailed information, Google Ellen Lustig and pick up on her various web sites.)

*YouTube Link to Caring Arts: Making Puppets with Ellen (Sock Bunny Puppet)*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHqcDRNB\\_ys](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHqcDRNB_ys)

*Material contents for this article were obtained from Ellen's web sites, with her permission, and phone interviews.*



## By the Way...

by Ann Onymous

In the Winter 2020 edition of the Puppety Journal there is an article by Steve Abrams. The headline is, "Profile of Frankie Cordero." We were pleased to see the four-page coverage of a puppeteer with original connections to Chicago and the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild. There are current members in our guild who can recall that back in 1990 at a Potlatch Pot Pourri, this little boy at the age of eight, knocked 'em out with his comedy routine. He did it year after year and got better each time. His Dad, Bob Cordero, a professional magician and clown, served as his mentor. It is mentioned in the article that age eight, he took him to the local library to look for "Of Muppets and Men." A helpful librarian, Una Mae Simon, happened to be a member of the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild and suggested that they attend a meeting. Starting with a CPG meeting and ending up being a success story for Frankie, and others with similar experiences, is reason enough to continue efforts to maintain an active guild. If you have access to the Winter 2020 Journal, get acquainted with Frankie.



*Frankie Cordero and Rudy Monster, Sesame Street, Season 51. Photo by Richard Termine, courtesy of Sesame Workshop. Retrieved from Winter 2020 Puppety Journal 5/27/2020*

## My Life with Puppets "First Steps into the World of Puppetry"

by Susan Bass Marcus



Puppetry is an art form. My goal as a beginner was to be more than competent. I knew I needed coaching and would never perform in public unless I trained with a professional. I found that person, Hans Schmidt, who had a studio in Lincoln Park. A beloved performer, educator, and teacher, Hans offered small-group lessons. Over time, he gave me insights into hand puppet scripting, movement, and business tips. Encouraged by his enthusiasm for my work, I studied with him for quite a while and became enamored of the practice.

After months of lessons and experimenting with little shows for my children and their neighborhood friends, I decided to perform for a small fee. The puppet shows I created were for children's birthday parties. I assumed younger children would be receptive to the fantasy world I would bring into their homes. Although I often used a small, portable stage consisting of a playboard, a stand and curtains, usually I let my young audience see my puppets attached to my arms. I was comfortable animating my puppets directly in front of an audience, like a storyteller.

For example, I modified two plush rabbit toys, one skirted and the other dressed in denim overalls, to animate a skit for the duo followed by my conversation with the girl rabbit. Seated in front of my audience without a stage between us, I would chat with her: "How are you today, Ms. Bunny?"

The puppet would answer and we'd carry on, joking and asking each other riddles. Although my puppet had no moving mouth, children watching our interplay believed the rabbit was talking to me. In a way, I was using the techniques of ventriloquism to produce that effect. Ventriloquism is all about illusion, misdirection, and sound substitution. I managed (usually) to speak for the puppet through slightly parted lips and I always looked at it while the puppet was 'speaking.' In the illusion business that technique is 'misdirection.' During my turns to speak, I faced the audience. When Ms. Bunny 'spoke,' I looked at her. Visual cues created the illusion that we were engaged in repartee.

Later and many years into my puppetry career, I often entertained at two or three birthday parties a weekend if I wasn't otherwise occupied. One afternoon I arrived at a Chicago suburban home with several sets of puppets and materials for a puppet-making workshop. A five-year-old boy was having a birthday party and his parents had hired me for an hour-long program. I spent some of that time setting up and answering children's questions about the show. When all my equipment was in place, I gathered my audience together and began the program. I started with my version of Little Red Riding Hood. The wolf was rather sympathetic, did not really eat Grandma, and everybody won in the end. Next, I brought out my rabbit friends who danced and did a comic little routine with blocks. When that ended, I carried Ms. Bunny from behind the stage, held her close to me, and began the voice-throwing bit.

The kindergarteners seated close to me were fascinated, and I thought how much fun it was to bring a little magic into their lives, directly without the mediation of television. Suddenly, from the back of the group an older child's voice rang out. "I know how you do that!" he shouted. I spotted the child, a little boy somewhat bigger than the other birthday guests.

"Of course you know how I do this. I'm a puppeteer and I bring these puppets to life."

"No, no," he said. "That's not how you make Ms. Bunny talk."

"Ah-ha. You have discovered my secret. What's your name and how old are you?" He stood up and proudly declared he was Brian and six-and-a-half, almost seven-years-old!

"And," he said, "you've got a radio strapped to your chest. That's what makes the puppet talk." He smiled and lifted his chin in triumph.

The other children stared at my chest. "Well, I'm happy you were watching so carefully. Let's see what else Ms. Bunny has to say." I shifted Ms. Bunny closer to me and continued my show. Happily, the boy's outburst had no effect on the other children's engagement with Ms. Bunny's antics. They applauded enthusiastically as she and I ended our conversation. We bowed and I moved into the puppet-making segment of the event.

I have often thought about that day and the differences in children's development and perception of the world. My critic had been thinking deeply about the way I made Ms. Bunny talk. He was at a new stage of discovery in his life and needed to know how it all worked. The other, younger children were not at that point yet, or perhaps were not as willing as Brian to voice their doubts. I imagine they wanted to linger in the fantasy a little bit longer and I enjoyed bringing it to them.

The CPG is on Facebook, too!  
Be sure to check us out!



Have You Checked Out  
the CPG Website Lately?



Be sure to visit our guild's web site on a regular basis for the latest postings on what's happening in the Chicago area, the latest on the Great Lakes Regional Festival and a roster of active and newly added puppeteers. Events and Shows page has the latest posting of local performing companies, their current production and a link to their web sites, current and past issues of the Puppet Pater, and more!

Our address is:

[www.chicagopuppetguild.org](http://www.chicagopuppetguild.org)

# Happy Summer!



## Leave 'em Laughin'!

**THE FAR SIDE** by Gary Larson



"OK, one more lime and it's off to bed for the both of you. ... 'Hey, Bob. Think there are any bears in this old cave?' ... 'I dunno, Jim. Let's take a look.'"