

Willie Kaye Eulogy
Requiem Mass 24th Aug 2017
by Gavin Little

Willie Kaye or to be accurate

William Keith Kaye

(Willie the Wizard)

Born 03/03/1928

Passed away 17/08/2017

89 years of age

Born in the West Midlands town of Lichfield, England in 1928. Known as the Black Lands, named for the vast coalmines that formed much of the landscape in an era when coal was king.

Willie was the third of four children from his parents Lucy and Andrew. He had an older brother and sister and a younger brother. He grew up in a 2 bedroom house where he shared a bedroom with 2 brothers and sister. I have to feel sorry for his sister. Willie remembered fondly that a number of houses in the street shared 3 outside toilets that butted up against each other in a row. Willie thought it was a good place to catch up with the neighbours and the street gossip

as you did your business. I shudder to think how a modern teenager would react if thrust into this environment.

Life cannot have been easy for a small boy growing up amidst the great depression. From an era of poverty and hunger he was thrown in to a world war and emerged a happy, well adjusted and likeable young man.

Willie's interest in magic began at a young age. Lucky for us and lucky for the world an amateur magician lived near his hometown of Broomhills. Willie would pester him for tricks and to learn how they were done. Thus he had a mentor and we thank this anonymous man for the great job he did.

Of course as a young teenager he discovered girls and magic took a back seat for a while. But not for long.

In 1946, at the age of 18 he joined the Navy. He was assigned to a mine sweeper and spent several years searching for and defusing sea mines. He was demobilised in 1950 and returned to his home in the West Midlands where he did what his family had done for generations. He went to work in the coal mines. He would tell how he would walk 3 and a half miles to work, descend 1 mile under the ground and then hunched over cover 4 miles under ground.

Arriving at work as dawn was breaking and emerging from the mine entrance at sunset. I can neither appreciate nor understand a life like this.

I don't think Willie could appreciate it either. After 4 years he moved to Birmingham to live with an aunt. This broadened Willie's exposure to the

magic community and his client base. Supplementing his income he worked in a shoe shop for a number of years and eventually worked as an electrical spare parts sales rep.

1966

Willie arrives in Australia. And boy did he arrive. He was a tour de force. He quickly made a connection with the magic community and within 18 months was elected president of WASM (West Australian Society of Magicians) in 1968. To thousands of Children who saw him in person and on TV he was Willie the Wizard. To the adult community he was known as Willie Kaye master magician.

It was during this time that Willie met Bev whilst attending a dinner party hosted by Grace and Wally Stanisforth where Wally was a long standing member of WASM. After a brief courtship Bev and Willie married in 1967.

They eventually settled in Balga and Willie commenced his career with Atkins Carlisle Electrical Wholesalers.

They had two children Louise born 1969 and Simon born in 1970.

To list Willie's achievements would take all day. He was a magician on a mission and his early days in Australia were amongst his most productive.

Some achievements of note are;

1. He appeared on the first ever Telethon in 1968. Willie did not have fond memories of this. Willie recalled total chaos on the night and almost no organisation. He vowed he would never do another, and didn't.
2. In 1969, he was hired by the Perth Mint to help advertise the new style 50 cent coin with the angled corners. The advertisement showed a pair of hands stacking 3 of the new fifty cent coins on top of each other by their edges. The hand then flicked the middle coin and made it spin. Of Course the hands were Willie's and he fondly reminisced how it took well over 50 takes to get it right. Either the coins flew off the table in all different directions or the centre coin did not stop in the right spot for the camera.
3. He was a magician who knew how to market himself and he was incredibly media savvy. Between 1967 and 1970 he made headlines in the Daily News, Sunday Times the Northam Gazette and many of the community newspapers for his ability to predict the news headlines over a week away. His prediction would be placed inside a cylinder and locked away in a box. A week later in front of witnesses the box would be unlocked and the cylinder opened to reveal he had actually predicted the front page headline for that day. This gave him invaluable free PR and he gained many bookings and solid reputation as a master magician.
4. Willie also made regular appearances on the Humphrey B Bear in Sunny West Land show, that was compared by Caroline Noble. To thousands of children each week he was Willie the Wizard and this enhanced his professional standing in the community.

5. In 1980, he was hired to consult on a major motion picture shot here in WA called the Harlequin. The movie starred Robert Powell, David Hemmings, Carmen Duncan and Broderick Crawford. It was the story of a struggling Member of Parliament whose life is disrupted by the sudden arrival of a strange prophet like character with seemingly magical powers. The magical powers were provided by Willie.
6. In 1996, in recognition of his contributions to WASM and the community at large, Willie was made a life member of the club. Never has there been a more deserving recipient of the award.

These were accomplishments that Willie did not brag about. These are stories that were teased out of him or short conversational remark mentioned in passing. An incredibly humble man, he never spoke ill of anyone and was universally liked by all who met him.

I personally met Willie some 30 years ago. As a new member to WASM, Willie was one of the first clubmen to approach me and welcome me to the club. I was drawn to his knowledge and skill. I couldn't wait for the next meeting to see what trick Willie would do. He was a mentor to me and so many other magicians, giving advice and constructive criticism, he was eager to teach and I was eager to learn.

Watching Willie perform was not only entertaining but educational. Willie was an entertainer first and magician second. For Willie, magic was the tool he used

to entertain. He could take the most mundane trick and make it highly entertaining just by the way he presented it.

I have fond memories of the hot summer afternoons we would sit on his back patio doing magic tricks for hours. We would break down tricks and try to come up with ways to improve them. This was invaluable training as Willie taught me how to think outside the box. There was no magical problem he could not solve.

In 2010, Willie suffered a stroke that affected the right side of his body. This severely affected his ability to handle cards and magic props. For the first time I saw the frustration and acceptance from Willie that magic would no longer be a major part of his life. I would spend hours showing him my new card tricks and asking for advice but I could see the spark was gone from his eyes.

So how should we remember Willie?

He was a kind and gentle man who loved a good laugh. His attitude to life was something to aspire to. He was a man dedicated to his family. His constant smile and the spark in eyes was disarming and reassuring.

Willie you will be greatly missed and Greatly loved.

Goodbye my friend. See you on the other side.