

How I Spent My Summer Vacation by Mac King age 38

Everybody who has any sense knows there's a big difference between a convention and a get-together. A convention takes place at a Convention Center in a big city. A get-together takes place in your living room or back yard. A convention has non-stop organized activities. A get-together is more laid-back and informal. A convention means networking and politics and meeting new prospects. A get-together means hanging with your old pals. Because a convention sounds like work, and a get-together sounds like fun, my favorite magic event of the summer has always been Abbott's Magic Get-Together. I went to my first one when I was 16.

Because it's a get-together, there's no need for a big jam-packed day of events. Oh, they have events at Abbott's, but they're different events from a magic convention. Does the IBM Convention have a Vent-O-Rama? Of course not. Can you go visit the graves of Karrell Fox, Duke Stern, The Harry Blackstones, Percy Abbott, Monk Watson, Little Johnny Jones, and Ken Griffin(sp?) at midnight during the SAM Convention? Not without a long drive you can't.

But, to me the big difference between Abbott's Get-Together and any other magic convention is accommodations. At a convention just about everyone stays in the convention hotel. Because The Get-Together takes place in the tiny village of Colon, Michigan, most visitors are obliged to stay in the house of a stranger. Sometimes the actual residents remain at home and simply rent out a room to a registrant for a week, and sometimes they leave town and rent out their whole house to a group of folks. That was the arrangement that my friends and I had.

We had decided to meet at Chicago's O'Hare airport, rent a van, and then make the three hour drive to Colon together. Since I was arriving first, my job was to get the van and find my four pals. I got the van no problem. First to arrive would be Dana Daniels, the fine comedy magician and long-time Disney employee. At the appropriate time I parked the van at the curb and ran into the baggage claim area. I spotted Dana's fedora right away. I told him to meet me on

the curb right outside the door. I ran back to where I'd left the van, and there it was, up on a tow truck.

"But I was only gone a minute!" I shouted at the grimy old guy behind the wheel of the tow truck.

"Does the sign say, 'One minute parking'?" he wittily retorted.

"Fifty dollars cash to you sir, if you'll just drop her right there where she is!" I pleaded.

"No can do. Once she's up, I gotta take 'er in," sez he. "But hey, hop in and I'll give you a ride to the lot." He was a friendly sort.

"I can't. I gotta go back in and tell my friend that I won't be here when he comes out."

A mere seven dollar cab ride and 115 dollar fine later, I had regained possession of the van. An excellent beginning to our good time.

Dana was waiting for me. Our second passenger was Patrick Albeniece who is the club manager at The Magic Castle in Hollywood. Being a management type, he was right on time and no trouble whatsoever.

I should say that Patrick was no trouble himself. He did, however, bring bad news. Our final two passengers, Tina Lenert (past winner of Stage Magician of the Year at the Magic Castle) and her husband Mike Caveney (past nominee for Stage Magician of the Year at the Magic Castle), had missed their flight and wouldn't be in for another hour. Our plan was proceeding perfectly. They did finally arrive, and once they were safely on board the five of us trekked on to Colon without incident.

We passed the sign welcoming us to Colon, "The Magic Capitol of the World" right at 8 o'clock. Just in time to see Gordon Miller open the show with the traditional Abbott's Spectacular Finale. The show was typical Abbott's. Some good acts and some stinky acts, all performing in an inadequately air-conditioned high school gym full of really sweaty, but happy, magicians. We hung around and visited

with friends for a couple of hours, and then it was time to find the house that had been arranged for us by the kind Abbott's folks.

Tina went away and came back with a map someone had drawn for her. It was not a good map. Most of the streets weren't labeled, and there was no mention whatsoever of the actual address of the house we were looking for. Pretty much this map just directed us to find the white house next to the cottages. How tough could that be, even in the dark, in the rain? Turns out it was pretty tough. We road around for literally 30 minutes (which is tough to do in a village) and couldn't find it.

Finally, we found a house with lights on so that we could see there was someone awake inside. Mike and I went to the door and knocked. A woman came out on the porch. "Can I help you?" she asked.

We were ready to put our feet in our mouths. "Yes ma'am. We're lost. We're looking for a house. Some idiot drew us this map. By any chance, can you help us figure out where we're supposed to go?" We showed her the map.

I swear to you that after glancing at the map she said, "I drew that map." She was nice enough to pretend that we hadn't, just seconds before, called her an idiot right to her face. "You're very close to the house. One street off. Go back that way, go right and then right again. You're looking for the fancy mailbox that says Jackson on it. The house is wide open."

We found the fancy mailbox, Patrick jumped out and made sure it said Jackson. And then we pulled in the driveway. The doors were unlocked and wide open awaiting our arrival. We went inside. We were shocked. The fine folks at Abbott's had rented us a dump. The dishes from the last folks who stayed there were still sitting in the fly infested, greasy, cold water in the sink. There were also flies buzzing in and out the rotting rubbish still in the reeking trash can. It was quite unpleasant. But there were freshly laundered sheets stacked in the living room floor. And the place was big enough. Two bedrooms, a daybed on the enclosed porch, and a sofa-bed. While

everyone moved their stuff into the house, I bagged up the trash and did the nastiest sink of dishes I'd ever encountered.

As we were sitting around in the living room having a contest to see who could get the most socks stuck on the revolving ceiling fan, in walked a complete stranger. She screamed, "What the hell are you doing?"

I manage to squeak out, "Are we in the wrong house?"

"You're damn right you're in the wrong house. What's the matter with you?" she blared at us as we scrambled to gather up our stuff and get out.

As we tripped and fumbled our way out into the garage, we tried to explain our mistake. She wouldn't hear any of it.

"Don't y'all leave. I gotta call my mother," she said. We weren't going anywhere anyway. Her car had our van pinned inside the garage.

We just sat in the garage and giggled to ourselves until her mother arrived. Boy was she furious. "How could you be so stupid!? What made you think that you could just waltz into my house and make yourselves at home? Are you just complete idiots, every one of you!?"

Finally I asked her to call the police. She refused. Tina told her that she'd left her purse sitting inside on the coffee table. The woman went in and came back with it. When Tina held out her hand for the purse the woman threw it on the garage floor at Tina's feet. This kind of hostility went on for 45 minutes! I have never seen anybody stay so enraged for so long a time. I mean, I can understand her being upset. After all we WERE in her house. But you'd think after a little while she'd at least listen to our explanation and figure out that we meant no harm.

Finally Mike asked her to move her car so that we could leave.

"Oh no!" she shrieked. "You're not leaving here until my daughters have gone over every inch of this place to make sure you haven't stolen anything."

"Ma'am," I said, "The only thing we've done is take out your trash, and do your dishes."

With that she finally almost smiled. But not quite. It was still took about 10 more minutes of her yelling at us before she finally relented and let us go.

About an hour later, when we finally did get settled into the right house (we were off by one—the correct house was right next door), and I crawled into bed and stared up at the ceiling thinking about our little escapade, I found that I couldn't help but just laugh out loud. And then lo-and-behold I heard more laughter coming from the bedroom across the hall where Mike and Tina were, and down the hall Dana and Patrick were also laughing.

The rest of the weekend was a typical Get Together. We visited with friends in the American Legion Hall, we had milk shakes in the M & M Grill, and we sat in the elementary school bleachers and watched people buy stuff. And if ever the conversation lagged, all that was necessary to get things rolling was for one of us to mention something like, "Can you imagine what that woman would've done if she'd come home and we'd been asleep in her beds?" It was a horrible event, but since it's a great story I'm glad it happened, and truthfully I can't wait 'til my next Get Together.