

# Storyteller

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# Doody calls

'Bozo Show's' Wizzo talks freaks, mobsters and clowns in his Geneva home

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Geneva resident Marshall Brodien may be better known as Wizzo the Wizard (pictured top left, circa 1986) from WGN-TV's popular show called "Bozo's Circus" and "The Bozo Show." Brodien shows off some magic tricks in his museum-like basement. PHOTOS BY MARIANNE MATHER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

# '... I lived a weird life'

SIDESHOW BARKER, HYPNOTIST, MAGICIAN ... MARSHALL BRODIEN, AKA WIZZO, HAS DONE IT ALL

*It's 11:44 in the morning and a beloved figure from my childhood is going to chop off my head.*

*I'm on my knees in a basement with my head in a guillotine. The last thing to run through my mind before the blade does is that I'm wearing a red checkered shirt. How odd to die in a red checkered shirt.*

*"Hold your ears," my executioner instructs as he lays a hand on the lever.*

*I oblige, but wonder why.*

*"So if your head falls off, you can catch it before it hits the floor."*

*Thanks, Wizzo. I'm in the basement of Marshall Brodien:*

*magician, hypnotist, wizard-clown. Yes, that Wizzo, the one who spent more than a quarter-century entertaining children on "Bozo's Circus" and "The Bozo Show." With the magic Stone of Zanzibar and the sacred words "Doody Doody Doo," the wizard from Arobia charmed, amazed and delighted decades of WGN-watching children with disappearing scarves, rabbits from thin air, floating gorillas and playing cards that did everything but stand up and sing the national anthem.*

*And he's going to chop off my head.*



By Paul Dailing

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Marshall Brodien started his entertainment career as a magician and a sideshow barker at the Riverview Amusement Park in Chicago. Here he is seen on stage with an armless man, the escaping woman and a guy with his head in a clamp. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARSHALL BRODIEN

Marshall Brodien's story is one of human freaks and mobsters. In addition to millions of wide-eyed youngsters, Brodien has entertained soldiers, killers, cops, strippers and Pyro Sam the Human Ostrich.

His Geneva home on a McMansiony strip of Fargo Boulevard does not seem like the house of a wizard, sideshow barker,

hypnotist or any other of the jobs Brodien has held. It seems like the house of an investment banker or well-off dentist.

Brodien himself seems like someone's dentist as well. He's wearing a tucked-in polo shirt and khaki slacks. He shakes your hand and all you think is how normal he seems. No eye-rolling, no "Doody Doody Doo."

The first sign of oddness in the Brodien home starts as you walk toward his upstairs office. The walls are lined with devil-covered posters of hypnotists, escape artists and tricksters of the 1920s to 1940s. Names like Okito, Jack Gwynne, Thurston and Blackstone jump off the original — not reproduction — posters.

The largest bit of

Wizzo memorabilia in the upstairs office is a portrait of Brodien in full makeup. The painting is signed R.T. Brown. That's Roy Brown, better known as Cooky the Clown.

"He was a fantastic artist," Brodien said of his friend, fellow Bozo sidekick and touring partner in "Marshall Brodien and Cooky" magic shows.

Brown died in 2001 at age

68. "The Bozo Super Sunday Show," as it was called then, would go off the air later that year. It was 40.

A bit more memorabilia, then it's down to the basement. Although the basement has Bozo goodies galore — the Wizzo costume, the actual Stone of Zanzibar and Cooky's original wig, to name a few — it's a shrine to magic and gangsters, as much

as it is to TV clowns. The entire floor is jam-packed with three quarters of a century of memories.

"I don't feel 75," Brodien said. "Maybe because I lived a weird life."

Wizzo the Wizard came from the mythical land of Arobia. Marshall Brodien came from Chicago in the 1930s.

BY PAUL DAILING FOR BEACON NEWS. WIZZO, PAGE 23



Marshall Brodien as a budding magician, seen here waving shooting flames. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARSHALL BRODIEN

**WIZZO**

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Magic first found Brodien in the seventh grade when his school had a guest magician. Brodien soon began spending all his money on tricks. He would later work at a magic shop called The Treasure Chest, clerking and demonstrating tricks. From there, he was hired as a magician at Riverview Amusement Park in Chicago. The previous magician had, pardon the pun, disappeared.

"I went there as a magician, but they liked the way I talked, so they made me a sideshow barker," Brodien said.

He was 16. And his most boring story out of his time at Riverview was about learning to eat fire and swallow swords.



*The guillotine isn't terribly uncomfortable. Granted, I wouldn't want to wear it around like a necktie, but it could be worse in terms of comfort. Those whiny French kings.*

*One merciful feature of Dr. Guillotin's proposal is the positioning. I'm on my knees, looking at the ground. I can't see the blade hanging above me.*



Every inch of the walls in Brodien's basement is covered in photographs, ranging from Brodien meeting Muhammad Ali to "Priscilla the Monkey Girl" from the Riverview Park freak show. Brodien points at a picture of the latter as he rattles off his old banter, word-for-word.

"We have the monkey girl with long, black, shaggy hair just like a monkey, two rows of

teeth in the upper jaw like the anthropoid ape, pouches in the side of her cheek where she could store food for days at a time if needed."

In addition to Priscilla, there were The Rubber-Skinned Man; Pyro Sam the Human Ostrich; Betty Lou Williams, the World's Only Four-Legged Girl; and Emmett the Alligator-Skinned Man, to name a few.

Priscilla and Emmett were married, but they weren't the only example of love among the freaks. There was also the pink-haired strong-woman, Ada Ash.

"She wrassled alligators, her husband boxed kangaroos and they had a wrasslin' bear," Brodien said, pointing in an old album to a picture of a man getting punched in the face by a glove-wearing buck named Pogo.

Then there was Betty Lou Williams, the World's Only 4-Legged Girl, who had the body of her dead conjoined twin sticking out from her body. She was otherwise healthy, but died at age 28 in a car crash.

Each story was honed and precise, as practiced as his sideshow pitch. The smile in his eyes as he remembered long-gone friends was impossible to rehearse or perfect.



*My nose itches. It started a few seconds after I got locked in, but I can't really scratch it. Infuriating.*

*I wonder if that happened to Marie Antoinette.*



After a few years at sideshows, Brodien started performing at the Magic Lounge, a Cicero nightclub. He was 19, but



Hypnosis and levitation were just two of Marshall Brodien's signature acts during his early years. Here, Brodien is standing on a woman who is hypnotized and laying on the backs of two chairs. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARSHALL BRODIEN

his age was one of the smallest illegals of the mob-run club.

Getting pinched for the gambling and dancing girls was not a worry.

"I would come in and say, 'Where are the slot machines?' and they would say, 'Oh, the sheriff's going to raid at 10:30 tonight,'" Brodien said.

Brodien soon was working

many South Side clubs. While appearing at the Beacon Inn, Brodien shared the bill with a hypnotist who was interested in learning magic. The two decided to swap lessons, and soon Brodien was performing as a hypnotist. The double threat of magician and hypnotist was profitable for Brodien. Gifts from grateful, if diverse, audi-

ence members make up part of his basement collection.

There's a bottle of booze given him by 1960s Chicago mob kingpin Jackie "The Lackey" Cerone. And it's in a case with gifts from the Chicago Police Department's Emerald Society. Brodien wasn't trying to be

## WIZZO

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ironic: He hadn't even noticed the placement. There's just so much stuff in Brodien's basement and so little space. The cops' and mobster's respective gifts had to go somewhere.

The basement is a museum, laid out as if to give tours. There's only one section that looks like Brodien actually hangs out there. This is the place where the magazines are scattered and the coasters sit. It's by the TV.

This section where Brodien seems to spend the most time is covered with pictures of his wife, children and grandchildren — not of freaks, clowns or mobsters.

This, I find touching.

◆ ◆ ◆

*Just a little off the top "OK," he said. "OK?" I asked. "OK," he said, pulling the lever on the guillotine.*

◆ ◆ ◆

The urban legend about Bob Bell, the first WGN Bozo, getting touched

by the Stone of Zanzibar and making an on-air crack about Wizzo getting stoned at The Zanzibar is true.

"All the adults laughed," Brodien recalled after a story about Bell making an on-air joke about the "doody" part of Wizzo's "Doody Doody Doo" catchphrase.

Brodien liked Joey D'Auria, who played Bozo on WGN starting in 1984. But all his Bozo anecdotes seem to be about the original clown.

"Bob Bell was great," Brodien said, at a loss for words for once. "He was terrific."

Brodien started appearing on "Bozo's Circus" as himself in 1962, performing magic by day and doing his hypnotist act at Chicago's Cairo Supper Club by night. But the 1964 firebombing of the supper club (never officially linked to what one Chicago paper called "crime syndicate hoodlums") indirectly led to Brodien becoming Wizzo.

After the bombing, a now jobless Brodien took his magic act corporate, performing at trade shows for companies like Westinghouse, Owens-

Corning Fiberglas and Nalco Chemical. One client, the American Gas Association, let Brodien keep a wizard costume they made him wear at a convention. And Brodien was chatting with Bozo writer/producer Don Sandburg (who also appeared on the show as Sandy the Tramp).

"I said to him, 'Hey, look at this crazy costume they made me,'" Brodien said.

Sandburg thought for a second.

"You know, why don't you put on a beard and a fake mustache and a big, black wig and we'll have you on as a wizard."

At first, Brodien was just doing his act while in a crazy suit. But flanked by Bell and Brown (Bozo and Cooky), the magician-turned-barker-turned-hypnotist started taking on the role of clown.

There's more to the story, of course. The eye-rolling, the "Stone of Zanzibar" and even "Doody Doody Doo" all started as ad-libs. And we haven't even touched on his family, his time in the service, his career designing magic kits or the "TV Magic Cards" he sold on TV in the 1970s. You could write a whole book



During all the time that Marshall Brodien of Geneva was performing as a magician, hypnotist, sideshow barker and Wizzo the Wizard, he also was creating magic kits for himself and famous magicians. MARIANNE MATHER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

on Brodien's life. (And in 2008, a writer named John Moehring did just that.)

The record for one actor playing a single character in prime time is 20 years, shared by Kelsey Grammer (Frasier Crane) and James Arness (Marshal Matt Dillon). Brodien played Wizzo for 26 years, lasting longer than both Bob Bell (24 years as Bozo) and Roy Brown (25

as Cooky).

But now, it's time to chop off my head.

◆ ◆ ◆

*A whizzing and a clank. The blade is now by my knees. My head still seems to be attached. I crane it a little to be sure. Yep. Still capitated. The Beacon-News photographer claps. From inside the guillo-*

*tine, I could sort of feel how he did it (the clank gave it away), but from the outside, it's a flawless illusion. He explained the trick, then made the photographer and me promise not to tell anyone. I wouldn't have told anyone anyway.*

*My head was spared, although Brodien would later make it vanish in a box. That's a different story. Doody Doody Doo.*

## From the storyteller

Ring. Ring.  
"Hello?"

"Hi, Mom. It's me. So I'm typing up the Wizzo story and they want me to do it all 'writey' style. I thought it would be cute to share like Bozo memories. But I was a kid.

I remember watching Bozo, but do you remember me watching Bozo?"

"No."

"No?"

"No."

"But I did watch Bozo. I remember this."

"You watched tons of stuff. All I remember is giving you limited time and having to drag you away from the TV. You had 'homework time' and I would come in. I remember hearing you scurry scurry scurry — click. I would say, 'Have you been watching TV?' 'Oh, no no no.' But then the

TV would be like 400 degrees."  
"You checked the TV's temperature?"  
"You watched a lot of TV. Does this help?"

"Sure, Mom. Thanks."

Click.

— Paul Dailing, staff writer

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