

Guy Cater

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Thanks to Jason Fell for his photos

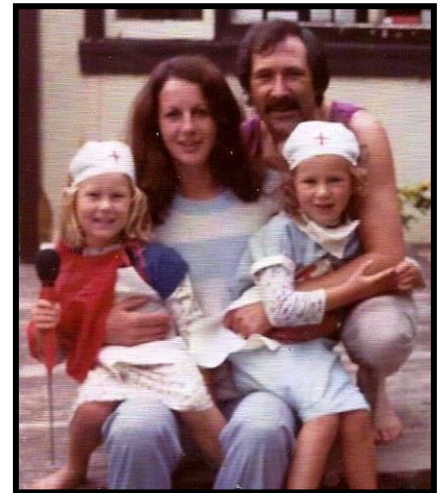


Mention 'Guy Cater' anywhere in New Zealand and the chances are that somebody's heard his name or even seen his show. Guy's work as a hypnotist, comedian and magician is top notch and his skills have taken him around the world; from the sands of the desert in the *United Arab Emirates* to the back of motorbikes in the pouring rain in Singapore. He was the first Kiwi hypnotist to work in Las Vegas.

Guy was born in Auckland on 7th May 1947 and grew up in Howick in a home full of laughter. His father was the emcee for the local lodge of the *Independent Order of Odd Fellows NZ*, a non-profit organisation founded in 1862 to help workers and their families with medical and funeral expenses. Nowadays it supports charities such as hospices, woman's groups and children's appeals.

Guy and some teenage school friends started a magic club and enrolled in a *Howick Little Theatre* drama school run by 1988 VAC Benny Award recipient Alma Woods. Here they studied everything from presentation to lighting and props.

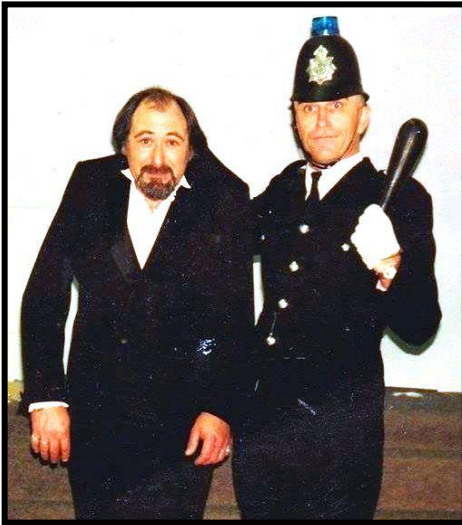
In 1967, while on his OE in London, Guy stepped up and entertained a crowd at an East End venue when the regular entertainment failed to turn up. This resulted in a regular gig at the *Thomas A'Becket Pub* being paid £5 a night. Considering he was only earning £4.10 for a full week's work at *The Overseas Working Men's Club* he quickly realised there was more to be made in entertaining than a regular 9 to 5. To amuse the crowds he used everything he could recall, from his parent's musical soirees to his early days of close-up magic. Three and a half years later he returned home.



Back in New Zealand and newly married to Robyn, Guy often found himself being asked to provide family shows. Robyn made him a hobo costume and soon *Happy the Hobo* was one of Auckland's busiest childrens entertainers. He worked as *Happy the Hobo* until Robyn passed on twenty years later. Guy recalls, 'I truly enjoyed doing it. The one thing that I did at the end of every show was say, 'If you see anybody without a smile, give them yours.' Then I'd stretch my arms out and ask, 'Who wants a hug?' The kids would come running up, but sadly you can't do that any more.' In 1979 Guy took the *Funniest Routine Award* and *Best Children's Entertainer Award* at the 17th *Magic Convention* in Auckland.



Ken Ring recalls organising a birthday party for his 5 year old daughter Miriam. He booked *Happy the Hobo* to entertain and was so impressed with Guy's show that he said to himself, 'I could do that!' and he did, calling his character *Mister Goodtime*. Ken went on to become President of the *New Zealand Society of Magicians*.



Guy grew up with hypnotism books around the house and eagerly studied them. Back in New Zealand he got a job as production manager at a pickled onion factory where one of the staff was having a problem with wetting the bed. Guy offered to help and after several weeks of hypnosis his friend could now wake up and use the toilet. Problem solved.

Guy realised how helpful hypnotherapy was and approached an agent to see if there would be any interest in booking him. The only other hypnotist working in Auckland was Richard Webster, recipient of a *1995 VAC Scroll of Honour* and winner of their *1997 Top Specialty Act*. Guy had to decide whether to become a clinical hypnotherapist or a stage hypnotist; he decided life was too short not to bring laughter and chose the latter.

After the death of his wife his friends talked him in to doing a full evening hypnotism show. He hired a well-known dance group called *La Belle Follies* and in the first half of the show Guy did comedy magic mixed with dance turns. After intermission he performed his full evening show. It was a great success. One night a man came up and said he'd like to take Guy to *United Arab Emirates*. Having heard this all before, Guy didn't think much about it but a few years later he was invited to take his show to Dubai.

Guy remembers it well. He first performed at a restaurant at 11 pm, then headed down to a club to entertain 2,000 people. That experience taught him a lot about different cultures and what would play and what wouldn't. For example, he usually did a routine where he would ask the volunteers to imagine they were watching an X-rated movie; this had to be taken out and replaced with 'horror movie'. Guy did this gig for many years until the bookers realised it was cheaper to get acts from the UK.



'There's a little town outside of Abu Dhabi where desert tours are run. The tourists are picked up in *Land Rovers* which lower the air in the tires when they get to the sand and then drive about a hundred miles into the desert where they camp overnight. I was booked to do an evening show for one of these tours and they drive you out through the desert with your body being bashed around. They'd booked a belly dancer as well. So, we get out there and there's about fifty people.'



'They brought the *Land Rovers* into a semicircle with the headlights on and we performed on this big Persian rug. First the belly dancer went out and did her stuff. They had a generator for the sound system and I did an hour of hypnotism and then the belly dancer came back in a different costume.'

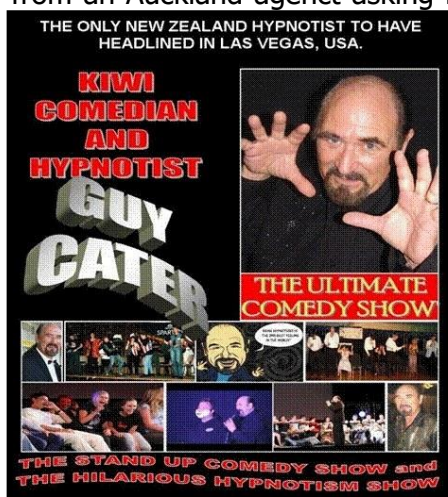
We got back into the four-wheel drive and headed home and I'm really enjoying it because you never know what you're going to see. I said to the driver, 'This must be fun driving at nighttime' and he went, 'No!' I looked closely at him and he was white as a ghost. His hands were gripped tightly to the wheel and he he told me he'd never before driven in the desert at night! I think I went white as a ghost too!

Guy reckons magic is a great introduction to a hypnotism show. It shows another skill and allows him to use comedy to warm up the audience. By the time he gets to the hypnotism part the audience is open to him. By doing his own opening act it enables him to perform full shows that could be up to an evening of 3-4 hours of entertainment.



Here's guy again. 'In 2001 I was asked to do a show in San Diego. This was before I married Cynthia in 2009. During the part of the show where I had volunteers riding a horse the stage collapsed. Thankfully nobody was hurt and we were able to carry on with the show by performing on the floor. At the end the principal of the school came up to me and I thought, oh-oh, here's a problem! Instead he asked me, 'You're not going to sue us, are you?' In those days I knew nothing about public liability but we quickly learnt that insurance in America was a must and we took out a 10-million dollar policy.'

About a decade ago Cynthia and Guy went to Papua New Guinea to entertain at the *New Zealand Club*. Guy recalls a mixture of nationalities; including Americans, Australians and Kiwis. The audiences were great, it felt as if he was doing a show back in the US again. Then, just before Covid hit, he got a call from an Auckland agent asking if there was any chance of him getting on a plane at 6:00am the next morning to perform for a cigarette company in Papua New Guinea? Never one to turn a gig down, Guy said, 'Sure!' When he arrived at the venue he noted that many members of the audience were Melanesians. 'It didn't freak me out', Guy says, 'but I wasn't really sure what to expect. However, like so many Polynesian people, I found them very good hypnotic subjects. It turned out to be a most amazing gig.'



'I had a funny thing happen a few years ago when I was staying in a hotel in Singapore he met the owner standing outside a big marquee. He told him it was for his mother's funeral, would I like to come in? He was very insistent and introduced me to all these people, so I did a little bit of entertaining for them. The next day he came to see me and it turned out he was also the President of the *Singapore Rotary* which were going to be hosting *Taiwan Rotary* the following week on the beautiful junk that used to sail around *Singapore Harbour*. He said they'd like to hire me to entertain these people for half an hour.'

On the night of the performance I was upstairs with the Singapore people, having something to eat and drink; the Taiwanese guests were all downstairs. When they said they're ready I went down to where they had this little table for me to stand on, then the host told me that nobody speaks English but he'll translate for me. On the spot I had to change my entire show and, thankfully, I always have magic and balloons with me. With translation I did a 30-minute show without any problem. Magic is certainly a universal language!'



'I was once hired to work the *Comedy Store* in San Diego. The show was called *The Best of LA and San Diego plus International Guests*. I was the international guest! There were about twenty of us sitting in the audience and when it was time to perform you walked to the stage via the audience. The acts were going on and the majority of them were really filthy.'

'Now, when to go on, you've got seven minutes. At five minutes they give you an orange light and when it goes red you've got thirty seconds to get off. I was uncomfortable and thought the quality of the comedy wasn't all that good so I said to the agent who'd hired me, 'Look, I don't think I can do this'.

I assumed I'd be on near the end but they suddenly called me and I was on. So, I'm walking through the audience and I'm thinking, 'Well, I'm just going to be me, I can't do anything else'. I did some magic but this is a stand-up comedy dub. I was feeling uncomfortable but was just getting into it when the laughter started, and they're not just laughing, their whole bodies are shaking.'

'I kept looking up and I saw no orange light ... maybe something's gone wrong. So I do a little more and I keep looking up but I never got any light. In the end I figured I'd done long enough so I finished and came off. I went to see the manager to apologise for going on for too long and he said to me, 'Oh, you were so good, I didn't want you to stop.'

'Anyway, the show finished and everybody moved outside because we were all smoking in those days. That night there was a scout from *HBO* and he wanted me to go to this big concert they have. It was to be in two weeks' time but unfortunately we were fully booked and just couldn't do it.'



'There was a guy there who taught comedy and he had some of his pupils performing that night. He said that my act was not stand up because I used magic. He was angry that, out of twenty comics, I was the only one that *HBO* wanted.

He said, 'You're using props, that's not stand up comedy.'

I said, 'Did the audience laugh?'

And he said, 'Yes'.

I said, 'Therefore it's comedy', and all the people around us started clapping.

I thought he was going to hit me.'



For some years Guy hosted *The Guy Cater Television Show* on *Face TV* which gave many up-and-coming entertainers their first appearance on television. He is a proud member of the *Brotherhood of Auckland Magicians* and regularly drives for three hours to attend their meetings and to spend time with other magicians. The *BAM* awarded him a *Presidential Citation* in 2019 for his contribution to the Society over the years.

He is a great supporter of the *Variety Artists Club* and over the years has worked on the committee (1983 – 84, 1988, 1991, 1998 – 99, 2005 – 06) and he did two stints as President from 1993 – 95 and again from 2005 – 06. In 1995 Guy received the *VAC Benny Award*, the highest honor that can be awarded to a Kiwi entertainer. They granted him a *Scroll of Honour* in 1985, the *Rielly Comedy Award* in 1991 and 1995, and he received the *Agnew Award* in 2007. In 1996 he was granted *Life Membership*. Cynthia Cater received a *Scroll of Honour* in 2006 for her work as Secretary from 2003 – 06.

Guy's mother Lila is nearing her 100th birthday; loves attending the *VAC Award Nights* and enjoys our newsletter. Guy has two daughters Vanessa and Virginia, and when Vanessa heard that her father had been diagnosed with a degenerative disease she immediately organised to take Guy and Cynthia on a trip of a lifetime to Cuba, New York, Las Vegas and Los Angeles!

Guy has been supportive to many Kiwi entertainers over the years. He's a true master of the craft and is one of the most respected and revered entertainer's in New Zealand. His career has spanned many decades and he embodies the true meaning of a variety artist. And his motto ... **Always Be Prepared!** Have a back-up just in case you need it. Chances are you won't but having it will let you be comfortable and, should something go wrong, the show can continue regardless.