

FAREWELL | CHRIS FRINGS

He lightened lives with humor, magic

By **THOMAS SPENCER**
News staff writer

When Chris Frings was a toddler and his mother asked him for a tissue to wipe the nose of his baby sister, he complied but brought her a teeny tiny shred of Kleenex, apparently pleased with himself that he'd performed his first trick.

A tease and entertainer all his life, Frings was also a serious chemist and scientist, a professional speaker on time management, leadership and business principles.

But he lightened everything from serious topics to dinner with the grandchildren with humor and magic.

In July, Frings, 67, was on his way to work his magic for patients at Children's Hospital when he fell ill and died.

Frings grew up on Bush Boulevard, the son of Raymond and Norvelle Frings. From childhood, he suffered from asthma, but found his place to shine on stage.

Coached by renowned Ensley High School speech teacher Florence Pass, Frings and his sister Diane took

public speaking and Frings added to that performance magic.

The two appeared on the Cousin Cliff show with Chris working magic and Diane playing guitar. After their performance, the Veteran's Administration Hospital and the Children's Hospital requested regular performances from the Fringses for crippled children and soldiers.

In high school, Frings worked at a downtown music shop that had a corner of the store dedicated to magical paraphernalia. As graduation approached, Frings wanted to go out on the road performing, but his father prevailed and Frings headed to Tuscaloosa for college. His magic act and performing ambitions were stored away, but not forgotten.

He earned a Ph.D. in clinical chemistry from Purdue University and followed that with a postdoctoral fellowship at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota before returning to Birmingham to work for Medical Laboratories Associates.



Chris Frings was a chemist, magician and motivational speaker.

He spent the next 20 years of his career working as a chemist, garnering professional accolades and publishing papers.

He was a perfectionist in his work and at home.

He liked things clean, neat and organized, so much so that his wife, Roberta, had to be careful when serving him dinner to make sure the foods on his plate didn't mix together.

But he also kept his love of

enchantment. Roberta reckons the Fringses and their two children made more trips to Disney World than any other family in Birmingham.

In the early 1980s, Frings began formulating an eight-year plan to leave his day-to-day lab work and get back in front of crowds.

His idea was an unusual one. He'd combine his organizational skills and love of public speaking with his talent for magic and take all that on the road as a motivational speaker. He appeared at conventions and company retreats.

As he honed his act, he wrote books with titles like "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Effective Time Management," "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Self Management & Leadership Strategies for Success," and "How to Start and Maintain a Consulting Business."

For adults, he made his practical messages more memorable with magic tricks and gimmicks. In one lecture about change, he would pass out little desktop dinosaurs to remind people they had a

choice: adapt to changing conditions or go extinct.

For children, he also mixed messages with his magic. He did themed shows at libraries and schools promoting patriotism, reading and character.

Frings also became a regular member of a volunteer crew that went to Children's Hospital to entertain the kids each Wednesday night.

Frings would accompany clowns such as Duke, Petals, Snickers, Lindy Lou and Snuggles, going room to room entertaining. The clowns would bumble through tricks and then Frings would perform one with skill.

When the kids would ask, "How'd you do that?"

Frings would respond, with a smile, "I did it very well."

To suggest a person for Farewell, contact Sherri Goodman at 325-2468, by fax at 325-2283, or e-mail at sgoodman@bhamnews.com.

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