

MAGICIAN JULIE ENG
CONJURES
WONDER...



JUST LIKE MAGIC

by Keith Norbury

MAGIC has played a leading role in her life for as long as Julie Eng, BCom '95, can remember.

"The story goes that I wasn't delivered by the stork," the Toronto-based Eng says. "I was pulled out of the hat."

She learned her first magic trick from her magician father, Tony Eng, when she was just a toddler. He later introduced her to a secret world that would eventually permeate every aspect of her life and lead her to networking with the likes of Las Vegas showmen Penn and Teller.

It wasn't until Eng studied entrepreneurship at the University of Victoria, however, that she learned a few business tricks — such as mastering the mysteries

of accounting — that gave her the tools to truly succeed at her chosen stagecraft.

"I'm very proud to have had my time at UVic," Eng says. "I think it's made a fundamental difference in my life."

Born and raised in Victoria, Eng is the daughter of one the city's most beloved magicians, who for decades owned the eponymous Tony's Trick and Joke Shop downtown.

Growing up, Julie, alongside her mother and her younger sister, often shared the stage with their dad. But Tony Eng, who grew up in Sidney and performed magic tricks at his parents' Beacon Cafe as a child, also passed the entrepreneurial bug along to his daughter. Aside from the trick and joke shop, he ran a wholesale business and a bartending school.

"So I grew up in that world of 'you've got to work, you've got to work hard, and you've got to be aware of about 3,000 things at once,'" Eng says.

At UVic, Eng dabbled in disciplines such as psychology,

economics and education. It seems only natural now that, in her second year, she gravitated to the entrepreneurship program.

"As I got to the higher-level courses, and class sizes became smaller, I really found my classmates and I were very like-minded," Eng says, recalling her move into the commerce program. "We were really getting into it. I loved it."

Well — it may not have been "love" for everything at first. Never strong at math, she hated accounting and found the double-entry system particularly vexing. But her UVic instructor challenged her to alter her style of thinking.

"The story goes that I wasn't delivered by the stork," the Toronto-based Eng says. "I was pulled out of the hat."

"I struggled with that course and I got something like an A+ on my final exam," she recalls. "But all those lessons that I really truly struggled with have benefited me immensely in my career."

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For example, the lessons proved invaluable in her role as executive director of Toronto-based Magicana, a non-profit organization that, according to its mission statement, is "dedicated to the study, exploration and advancement of magic as a performing art."

Founded in 2000 by magician David Ben and others, Magicana offers programs like My Magic Hands, a magic-teaching program designed for at-risk youth, and Senior Sorcery, which brings live magic to retirement homes and care facilities. Through these programs, Eng has brought imagination and delight to thousands of Canadians, and has also taught children to perform their own magic as an injury rehabilitation and confidence-building technique.

Over the course of her 30-plus-year career as a magician, Eng has appeared on many notable stages, most recently on the set of CBC's *The Nature of Things*.

In the episode entitled "The Science of Magic," Eng joins researchers in neurobiology and psychology as they use magic to explore cognition and consciousness.

"Something that magicians know better than most is that you can't always believe your eyes," says Eng at the beginning of the episode. Magicians have to be expert audience managers, manipulating quirks of human cognition to influence viewers.

"It was a wonderful opportunity and I'm dying for the chance to do more stuff like that," Eng says.

Eng pours her heart and soul into the magic industry, and she feels the rewards of community and career have repaid this amply.

"I am very lucky. A lot of people have put their arm around me in their magic learning and have given me great advice, great information, great coaching," she says.

She also met her husband, Suleyman Fattah, on the set of David Ben's show *The Conjuror* in 1997. Sadly, Fattah died of a heart attack in January 2017 at age 53. A talented illustrator and artist, Fattah "loved

working behind the scenes and making the magic happen off stage," says Eng. They worked together on many shows over the years, and later at Magicana.

These days, most of Eng's time is spent running Magicana and appearing on stages and at conferences across North America.

"I'm very fortunate because I love my job. My job is around something that I have grown up with — magic. It's near and dear to me for many, many reasons."

One reason is simply that it evokes a sense of wonder.

"I want to wow people and I feel like magic allows me to do that in a very non-invasive way, in the sense that I'm not selling them anything," she says. "I get to remind them of the power of imagination and being open to the seemingly impossible." ■

