

80 YEARS OF GARDNER MAGIC

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The magician and historian Max Maven poignantly eulogized Martin Gardner in his article “In Memoriam” in the July 2010 issue of *GENII* magazine (pp. 24-25). Commenting on the diverse interests of Gardner in non-fiction, puzzles, recreational mathematics, philosophy, games, skepticism, word play and magic, Maven noted: “So far as is known, the final Gardner publication during his lifetime was a magic trick that he contributed to the May 2010 issues of *Word Ways*, a quarterly journal with a small but fervent readership. I will mention, without humility, that the trick was based on one of mine – which in turn was based on one of Martin’s.”

We concur with Mr. Maven. We mailed the May issue Saturday morning May 8th and were informed by several Australian readers that their copies were received on Saturday May 15th. Gardner died on Saturday May 22 after complaining about difficulties in breathing and being rushed to a Norman, Oklahoma hospital that morning. He was mentally alert until the end.

We asked our webmaster David S. Dillon and later William Kalush of The Conjuring Arts Research Center for help in locating Gardner’s first magic publication. They both reported that it was in the May 1930 issue of *The Sphinx*, a magic magazine. Save for an earlier letter to the editor, this is regarded as the first article published by Gardner on any topic. A full span of 80 years to the month. Of course Gardner has several works currently in production and these will appear posthumously for some time to come (many in *Word Ways*).

Gardner had given us in 2008 written permission to publish anything he has written and we exercise that privilege now by reprinting his first magic trick and rerunning his last.

From *The Sphinx*, May 1930:

New Color Divination by Martin Gardner

Here’s a variation of the old crayon in tube gag.

Instead of crayons, small balls of colored gum are used, and any type of container in which to place them. The gum sells for a penny a ball in almost every barber shop. The trick is accomplished by slightly moistening the forefinger and rubbing it over the ball while behind the performer’s back. The color of the gum will come off on the finger where it is noticed when the tube (or whatever container you are using) is brought to the forehead. The trick is a good one to pull downtown when near a ball-gum vending machine, as it is entirely impromptu.

(From *Word Ways*, May 2010)

WORD WAYS MAGIC

MARTIN GARDNER
Norman, Oklahoma

This trick is based on a paper-fold idea by Max Maven that I included in my Sterling book *Mental Magic*. It occurred to me that “Word Ways” applied nicely to the trick. (The answer result word is in Answers and Solutions.)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| W | O | R | D |
| W | A | Y | S |

Fold the sheet into a packet eight leaves deep by folding it any way you like along the creases. After you do this, some cells in the packet will face one way, other cells will face the opposite way. Because you made the folds at random, there seems to be no way to know which cells face which way.

Trim the four sides of the packet with scissors, so that no cell is attached to another cell.

Spread the pieces on the table. Can you arrange the face-up pieces to spell a common English word? If you can, stop. If you can't, turn over all the pieces.

Try again to spell a word with the face-up pieces.

You are sure to succeed. What word do you spell?

Gardner reprinted his first trick as “Gumball Clairvoyance” in his 1993 tome *Martin Gardner Presents*, Kaufman & Greenburg (ed. by Matthew Field, Mark Phillips, Harvey Rosenthal, and Max Maven). Gardner commented on the one-ahead system used in the trick in an Addendum: “Alas, balls of gum now sold in machines no longer have colors that come off on a wet finger. I include the trick here partly because there may be colored candies on which it will work, and partly because I was surprised to see that I was sixteen when I sent this to *The Sphinx*.”

Actually, Gardner would not be 16 until October 22, 1930 so he was really 15 when he sent off the trick. He never really paid much attention to birthdays and, after all, had submitted at least six more tricks to *The Sphinx* in 1930.