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This book is dedicated to...

Pat Cave, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for starting me on the path that has led me here and has kept me out of trouble (mostly) for all of these years.

And to

My daughter, Laurel, who has given me reason to laugh, love, care and share. May this book, someday inspire her to follow her dreams and never give up.

Introduction

“If you would thoroughly know anything, teach it to others...”

-Tryon Edwards



My Purpose

The quote above reminds me of the importance of teaching what you know and knowing what you teach. In my years of working in different ministries and in different fields of study, I find that I have truly honed my skills when I am teaching others.

This quote has also been the driving force that has kept me on track when writing this book and I hope that you get as much pleasure out of reading it as I have had in writing it for you.

In my studies of the art of puppetry, illusion, clowning and stage performance, I have found one common thread among them all; the **suspension of disbelief** is vital for a performance to truly captivate an audience.

An audience goes to a puppet performance knowing that the puppets are merely dolls with moving parts, which are controlled by someone else, but during the time that they are spectators of the performance they have a willingness to forego reality for that period of time in order to be entertained.

Likewise, people go to the movies, play video games, get online, read books, create art, and “sleep per chance to dream” all for the sake of escaping their current reality if only for a moment. While they are stepping out of reality, they don’t have to worry about the daily grinds of life for that brief moment. In some cases, that temporary escape gives clarity to a decision that has been eating away at them, it may help them regain focus needed to do a project, it may even assist by giving someone time to take a break and see the futility in a fight they had just had. Everyone has a reason for temporarily turning off reality and we all need to be able to do it constructively.

Puppetry is not only an escape mechanism for the audience that is viewing the performance, but also for the performer as well. Being able to temporarily become someone (or something) else is a great form of escapism.

Along with escaping reality and entertainment, puppetry can be a great teaching tool which we will cover in the chapters to come, but first:

What You Will Find

There are many books out on the subject of puppetry. Depending on how much you have researched this topic, you may or may not find any new nuggets of information in this book that you can't find online or in other books, but the thing is you will have to go to many different resources to find all of the information that I have collected for you in this one particular book, making it a one-stop shop for those wanting to truly learn about puppetry the right way.

Though I have primarily written this book for those looking to create a puppet team. This does not mean that the novice individual looking to play around with puppetry as a hobby cannot glean a plethora of information.

If you are one of these hobbyists, don't put the book down and think that this is not for you. Who knows, you may want to advance your skill level to directing a puppet team in the future. I have tried to cover everything I could possibly think of dealing with puppetry.

History

Throughout this book, you will read tidbits of history. There are too many people out there who work with puppets and only see it as a form of entertainment, but have no clue as to how it was started, how it has advanced, or even what can be accomplished if one puts their mind to it.

For example; did you know that ventriloquism was associated with witchcraft at one point? Did you know that the very first Emmy Award was given to a ventriloquist? Did you know that one of the best solo puppet performers of the 20th century also created the first artificial heart?

To know the history of puppetry is to truly appreciate and respect the art in which you are delving into, but don't worry, this isn't written like a long drawn out history lesson. There will be no quizzes at the end. I just enjoy knowing that I am a part of a long, prestigious line of entertainers and I like to inspire others to research what they are getting into and hope that they catch the fire like I did.

As I stated, other than my personal experiences, the information in this book can be found in other sources, but I have tried to create a guide that has everything at your fingertips and I hope that you find this resource to be a valuable part of your library.

Enjoy!

Section 1

Chapter 1

A Brief History of Puppetry

You will find that the general definition of a puppet is that of an inanimate object being manipulated in order to create the illusion of life.

The history of puppetry is long and somewhat obscure. While today they are widely considered to be entertainment for children, more and more people have found that puppets have always held a place in history as a form of entertainment for all ages. By looking at the history of puppets, you can see that the contribution of puppets to art and entertainment is amazingly long and diverse.

While it is impossible to be certain, there are two rules of thought; one, that puppetry had its birthplace in India, almost a thousand years B.C. From this era, you can find stick puppets that were used to play out the Indian epics. Two is that they were originally used in China in the form of Shadow puppets. In either case, puppetry has been around since the dawn of recorded history, not only as entertainment, but also as sacred tools for relaying the history of a culture to its future generations.

A good example of this is in the Indonesian culture with their use of Wayang puppets. The shows were always opened with a narrative speech and blessing from a holy man and the entire performance was treated with a high level of respect and honor.

Centuries later, Bun Raku puppets were large, extremely expressive puppets used in Japan in place of actors. In the art of puppetry, it is believed that these were the first puppets to use animatronic features. There is a legend that a famous playwright grew tired of actors demanding that their parts be enlarged and that his plays could be much better acted by wood puppets. This being true or not, it led to a very colorful and imaginative world of theatre that still holds a place in Japanese culture today. To show the elaborate nature of these performances, there were, at times, up to three to four men operating one puppet on stage at a given time. All hooded and weighed down with dark clothing to enhance the illusion of the story.

In many places across Europe, puppets were used by the church to act out morality plays to teach pagan cultures Christian virtues and values. By the early 19th century, a Venetian puppeteer, Pietro Radillo, started creating marionettes that included as many as five to eight strings. This extra control gave the puppets a wider range of movement as well as a adding to the level of belief the audience had.

At this time in history, puppetry was looked upon as more of a lowbrow form of entertainment when compared to the traditional acting forms. Puppetry was versatile and you could find puppet shows in all sorts of venues such as resort entertainment and nightclub filler acts. You can still see this today.

In the early 19th century, there were discussions as to the viability of puppetry as an art form. There were even discussions that went as far as to argue that puppetry performance was better, in many ways, than real actors. You see this argument going on today with the advancements of CG animation. Puppetry has been as controversial through the years as it has been entertaining.

Here of late, there has been a growing, almost retro-style interest in puppetry. Using puppets in many different capacities and fields, from Vegas performance to police departments using them to help children open up about abuse; puppets have come a long way. Puppets are here to stay.

Thousands of years of history discussed in a few paragraphs do not do justice to the almost mystical history behind the artistic form of entertainment known as puppetry. If this is something that you are passionate about (and if you have this book, you are) I would encourage you to research beyond this book and learn the history of each type of puppet and make yourself familiar with them all. You may find that, in your performances, you will want to explore the use of different styles and not just stick to one style in particular. I find research fun.

Types of Puppets throughout History

Remember that puppetry is basically giving the illusion of life to an inanimate object; that being said, there are many types of puppetry. I will attempt to give you a brief overview of each here. This list is in no way finished and is not here to define each, but rather to give awareness of how advanced puppetry is.

Animatronics (mechanically manipulated puppets) – These are puppets that have advanced cable mechanics or remote control motors to assist in the movements.

Blacklight Puppets (puppeteers invisible) – These are used to give a free body form to fluorescent puppets. The puppeteers are not limited by the edge of the puppet stage.

Ban Raku (Japanese rod puppets) – These are beautifully hand carved wooden rod puppets, which have been in use for around 200 years. Used both visible to the audience as well as behind the screen as shadow puppets.

Costumed Puppets– These are oversized puppet bodysuits. You wear these puppets so that you can interact as a full character.

Finger Puppets– Small dolls with no filler that fit over your fingers. Most commonly made of glove fingers.

Found Puppets – Anything that you can find that you can give life to. I once made a dinner roll entertain some kids at a local restaurant.

Glove Puppets (or hand puppets) – These are what we are most commonly used to seeing when we think of puppets.

Javanese Wayang Golek (wooden rod puppets) and the Javanese Wayang Kulit (shadow puppets) – The puppets ('Wayang Kulit') are made from animal hide and are richly decorated and colored, since originally one half of the audience (the men) would sit on the side of the screen where the actual puppets could be seen, while the women watched the shadows. The puppets are stylized versions of people, with the head and hair being particularly prominent, since it is normally these attributes, which are used to identify the different characters.

Kirigami Bunraku- Similar to origami, these are multi-functioning, puppets made from cut paper that is fit together in a manner that gives it a 3D feel that works great on its own or as a shadow puppet. The amazing thing is that none of it is glued and many of these can be made using only two sheets of 8 ½ x 11” cardstock.

Marionettes (string puppets) – Marionettes are merely loose-jointed dolls attached to and controlled by a series of strings attached to a wooden control.

Muppet-types (mouth puppets) – Most common in today’s culture, are foam and fabric puppets that have moving mouths.

Parade Puppets (puppets used in parades or outdoors) – These are oversized bodysuit type puppets with very exaggerated heads, used to attract attention in parades or major events where the performance consists of being seen.

Human puppets (three arm puppets) – These are puppets that have a moving mouth but also have the ability to have two human hands. To have both arms operating as well as the mouth, it generally takes two puppeteers oddly contorted to operate, but gives a great effect.

Nip & Tuck-This design and pattern was originally used for the puppet in Nonsense which is a musical. Later it became popular with builders down in Brazil and many of

them have released it as their own pattern. Grey Seal Puppets termed a phrase "Nip and Tuck" for this type of construction where you take a full sheet of foam and a simple shape then start creating the puppet from there by cutting away bits of foam or folding them and gluing them.

Peeps – Commonly referred to as Oobey eyes do to a popular preschool character. Peeps are basically a pair of eyes attached to a ring. By wearing this ring, your hand becomes an automatic puppet. You can dress your hand up in costume or makeup, but it is not necessary. These are the easiest puppets to use, especially in missions work, because they slip easily into your pocket and go anywhere.

Rod puppets – Rods are attached to the arms in order for the puppeteer to control the arm movements of mouth puppets. It takes a little practice, but worth it.

Shadow puppets – Character images are used with backlighting to project the images onto a screen or reflected onto a wall to create the puppet.

Sock puppets – As the name suggests, these are puppets created out of socks. Today you can find patterns for what is commonly referred to as a glorified sock puppet, which used the same concept, but takes it one step farther; easy to make and inexpensive.

White light theatre (puppeteers visible) – This is not really a type of puppet as much as it is a type of performance.

Ventriloquist puppets/ventriloquism – These are puppets specifically designed for white light theatre performance. We will get into ventriloquism later in the advanced puppetry section.

Vietnamese water puppetry – This is a simple yet beautifully mastered style of puppetry. The puppets themselves are wooden figures that are attached to a floating pontoon, which floats just beneath the surface of the water; and makes the puppets appear to be floating. The pontoon is attached to a long pole, which allows the puppeteer to push or pull the puppet depending on the movement that is needed.

As stated earlier, this is not a finished list and should you decide to research in more detail, you will come across some that I have not listed here. The history of puppetry is vast and has many interesting facts. Research and have fun learning about this creative art.

Chapter 2

Fundamentals of Puppetry

The goal of a professional puppeteer is to make the puppet look as natural as possible so that the message can be projected without distractions. A puppet that makes unnatural gestures or movements will draw the audience's attention away from what's being

delivered. When the audience is focused on a puppet's mannerisms they aren't keying in on the message. In order to keep this from happening there are some must do's that need to become second nature to the puppeteer in order for the program to go on without any unwanted and unprofessional distractions.

The Entrance

There are some really bad ways to bring a puppet on stage. The bad thing is they are all common mistakes made all of the time.

Note: Before going over these, let me preface by saying that there is no wrong way to enter or exit **IF** it is intentional and fits the performance and it does not harm the puppet.

The Pop- this is where the puppet just pops straight up from behind the stage. A time where this is good would be in a situation where maybe someone is digging a deep hole and someone calls to him or her, then that puppet can do a sudden pop up. To use as an everyday entrance is too spontaneous and unexpected, therefore unnatural to the viewing audience and sets the tone for the rest of the program because, in the back of their mind, they are wondering when and where the next puppet will come from.

The Bounce- this one gives the impression that maybe the puppet was playing on a trampoline off stage. If the puppet is entering on a pogo stick then this is acceptable and can be a really good entrance, again, as long as it is intentional.

The Escalator- gliding in as if the puppet is on an escalator can be comical and entertaining, but only if the puppet skit calls for the puppet to arrive on an escalator. Any other time, the puppet looks as if it is ghostly and will detract from the presentation.

An, often times, lazy version of the proper entrance is, what I call, **The Ladder**. It works out to look like a slow pop up with a sway that gives the appearance that the puppet is climbing straight up as if on a ladder. This doesn't effectively use the depth of the stage and could look good if the skit is to take place on top of a roof or park slide, etc.

The Proper Entrance

Again, there is no wrong way to bring in a puppet as long as it fits into the skit or song that you are performing, but there is a standard that is generally used most of the time.

This standard entrance is **The Staircase**. To bring a puppet on stage in this manner, you want to picture an imaginary set of 3 to 5 stair steps and have your puppet walk up them to get to the stage. On the first step the head of your puppet should be below stage and on the last step, your puppet should be at proper height position (we will cover this shortly).

A common mistake made with this entrance is being too close to the front curtain which will give the ladder appearance, so make sure that you give yourself enough room, starting with your puppet hand pulled behind you in order to give you enough space to make your steps a proper distance apart.

Pay attention to how you and others walk up a flight of stairs. Do you stay even, up and forward? No, of course not. To do this would make your puppet appear to be jumping from one step to another; this one is called **The Hop**, by the way. And, again, rule of thumb is that it is fine if it is...? *Intentional*.

To pull off the entrance that we are looking for, start off on the first step with a lean to the right. As you come up to the second step, move your puppet incrementally forward and up in the same motion. Now, for the next step, do an equal sway (nothing too dramatic) to the left as you incrementally move up and forward. Keep switching out from side to side until you are in proper height position. Proper entrances may seem minor, but they do set the tone for the rest of the play.

This is really important when you have audience members who have seen good puppet performances in the past because they know that if there is purposeful care given to the little things like entrances, that the same level of professionalism and quality will be projected throughout the rest of the performance.

Proper Exits

An exit is just an entrance in reverse. This is the last thing the audience sees, and it will leave a lasting impression that will make them remember the performance and you (which comes in great when setting up future performances). A proper exit says you care about the entire performance, not just the main skits. It shows professionalism and a sign that you care enough to give them a quality performance from beginning to end. If you are sloppy on the exits, it's usually a matter of time before you get sloppy on other aspects of the performance. To do a proper exit, turn the puppet hand in toward you, NOT away from you, and then walk the puppet toward your chest as if it was going down the same steps that it walked up

Practice Tip: Have someone video tape you so that you can view your entrances and exits the way an audience will see them.

Proper Mouth Movement

There are two main no no's in puppetry that will register poor performance every time. They stand out like a sore thumb and turn off an audience quicker than anything.

The first is **biting your words**. This is due to lack of proper **lip synchronization** (lip sync). Lip sync is when the movement of the mouth is in proper time to the words they are being spoken or sung. Have you ever seen a movie where the soundtrack was off or an old foreign film where they have dubbed in another language over the original? This is what it looks like when your puppet has poor lip sync. When the lips and words are off

even by a second, it's almost enough to stop watching the performance. The goal is to open and close the mouth for each syllable and avoid biting the words. Simply speaking, when you bite your words, your mouth should be open when it is closed and vice versa.

Practice Tip: Stand in front of a mirror and speak. Watch every movement that your mouth makes, now put on a puppet and practice having the puppets mouth match yours.

A second common mistake in proper mouth movement is known as **flipping the lid**. This is when you unconsciously stop moving your thumb and start popping your forehead up to talk. What happens, in turn, is the lower jaw of the puppet stays stationary while the entire top of the head moves up and down. Try to talk like that... go ahead; try it. After a few seconds of talking like that your neck is going to hate you.

Because, the audience is projecting life onto these puppets, they know that this is painful and the puppet must be in pain. Subconsciously sensing the puppet is in pain makes the audience feel uncomfortable as well and now you have lost their attention and they couldn't even tell you why.

Practice Tip: Place your hand in the position that it will be in if you were wearing a puppet and place a light, easy to balance book on top of your hand and talk with your hand without knocking the book off.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is one of those subjective things because it all depends on what the puppets are doing and, like with the entrances and exits, there are exceptions to every rule. Some puppets look at the audience the entire time they are visible on stage while others keep their focus on another puppet or in different locations throughout the skit. It all depends on what they are doing. It is pretty important for puppets to show mutual respect for each other. If one puppet is speaking to another, the puppets generally look at each other. If the puppet is addressing the audience, you must remember that the audience is going to be at a slightly lower level than the stage, so the puppet needs, not only to look in the direction of the audience, but also slightly down to give the impression that the puppet is in eye contact with them.

An eye contact issue that is commonly made is **the stargazer** look, where the head slowly starts looking up toward the sky. This is usually caused by the puppeteer's wrist getting stiff in a locked position. This looks as if the puppet is getting bored with who he or she is talking to and decides to change his focus.

If you were at a party and someone you were speaking to all of the sudden started gazing up, what happens next? You start looking up to see what they are looking at. The same will hold true for the audience, they will think the puppet is looking up for a reason and they will, in turn, start looking up to see what he or she is looking at. This is another distraction that will take away from your performance.

Now if a puppet is talking with another character in the skit, it is fine (and actually natural a.k.a more realistic) for your puppet to occasionally look around. This also allows the wrist to move so that it doesn't get in that locked position that hurts so much and leads to stargazer syndrome.

Practice Tip: get a dowel rod about 6" to 12", nothing too thick, just something with a diameter of no more than 1/4". Now hold it in between your middle finger and ring finger so that it is pointing like an extended finger. This becomes a focus line. Use this to practice where your puppet is staring. In no time at all you can visualize without any help as to exactly where your puppet's eyes are falling.

Proper Height

Keeping your puppet at a steady height while on stage is important to the believability that the puppet is real and there is a floor under him. It is totally unnatural for a puppet to move up and down while on stage; unless he or she is doing squats or playing on a remote lift. It is, however, acceptable to move from side to side on occasion.

This is another technique that will give a realistic feel while helping the arm to get circulation in it. When arms get tired, like with the stargazer, some puppets will find themselves standing in **quicksand**. The puppet slowly starts sinking down. As the puppeteer's arm gets tired it begins to lower.

Puppet Posture

Another thing that happens when the puppeteer's arm gets tired is **the lazy prop**. The puppet begins going forward until it is lying on the crossbar of the stage. This looks unprofessional, gives the impression that the puppet doesn't want to be there, and it could also knock over the stage if you are not careful. I have seen this happen a few times.

I have also seen puppeteers who get away with this mistake go on to make it a habit of doing it from the beginning. We will touch on standards in section 3 of this book, but right now just let me say that in my puppet troops, if you are too tired to keep your puppet off of the crossbar, then you are too tired to do the performance and I will not let the puppeteer practice.

It may seem harsh, but what's worse, not letting a puppeteer perform or letting him perform with poor standards and the stage falls over in the middle a performance that someone has paid you for? Plus, my puppet troops are all ministry based, so we do it all for the glory of God and I believe that we should give Him our best.

Puppets should keep a good steady posture the entire time that they are on stage. There are some techniques that can be done to help prop the arm up, but in the end, it is more professional to keep your arms and upper body in shape, so no matter where you are performing, you will not have to worry about your arm losing strength.

Practice tip: There is only one-way to keep from quicksand and lazy prop and that is to have physically fit arm, shoulder, and upper body. A good way to practice position and form while building up your dexterity, it to hold a 12 ounce can of soda as if it were in your puppet's mouth and your puppet was on stage. Keep it up for as long as you can. Try to get up to 10 minutes without dropping your arm, when you accomplish this, move to cans of soup and then small dumbbells.

Know Where You Are

I rarely see this, but it does happen. **Magnetic attraction** takes place between puppets. Puppets start leaning into each other to the point they are almost holding each other up. To give realistic distance between the puppets also means that there is an effort behind stage for puppeteers to give each other space to move around. It is a given that there are going to be times where puppets need to touch in a skit, but when possible, they need to all have their own personal space to move around in

Another common mistake that sometimes takes place when someone realizes that they are in quicksand, they do a **startled jump** which is basically a sudden over correction to readjust the puppet back to it's original position. It is great that you want to correct yourself, should you find that you are out of position, but subtly do it. Try not to make it absurdly obvious as to what you are doing.

Practice Tip: In front of a mirror try repositioning yourself subtly without it being obvious that you are doing it. Remember that the puppet will have small subtle moves anyway, no matter whether he or she is speaking or not. This adds to the illusion of life and to the suspension of disbelief in the crowd.

Believable Actions and Interactions

Again, I stress, if it is intentional and fits into the script as a viable action, then it is not wrong, but if done out of character or unintentionally, it is not professional and needs to be worked on.

Actions need to look real. If they seem out of place for the situation or it looks as if the puppeteer is just trying to move for the sake of moving, etc. then it adds subconscious confusion to the audience. They wonder in the back of their head as to why the puppet is doing what he or she is doing.

One such unbelievable action is the **zombie stare**. There are two ways that I have seen this mistake commonly done. One is when a puppet is supposed to be interacting with another puppet or character on stage, but the entire time barely or never looks at the other

member, but keeps their gaze on the audience at all times. The other way that I have seen this done is when one puppet is injecting something and the entire time the other puppet appears to be frozen, giving no response at all to what is being said or done.

Other examples of this are common, but these are two most common. The all time best zombie stare that I have ever seen though still has to be the time when there was one puppeteer operating two puppets to a recorded audio. He couldn't keep it straight as to which puppet was supposed to be doing the speaking, so he only had one doing most of the lines while the other just set there. He might as well have held up a stick in place of that puppet.

Many audience members may not notice little things like this specifically, but subconsciously they catch it and it doesn't allow them the ability to fully set back and enjoy the full performance because they are unconsciously focusing on the little idiosyncrasies of the performance.

With a professionally realistic performance, the audience's attention is on the message in the skit and not the puppet's movements.

Practice is the key. Practice, practice and more practice. With this you will find that many of these things become second nature. When I am teaching and I try to show someone an example of biting words, it is really hard for me to do because I naturally don't do it, so I have to make myself mess up and it is still hard for me to do at the time I am doing it.

Chapter 3

Care and Storage

Whether you have a successful puppet team already established and in place or you are in the gathering information mode in an attempt to start one, you know (or are finding out) that puppets and props can be a costly investment. Remember that this is an investment into children's lives, therefore totally worth the price, but also remember that, in any venture for God, stewardship is important. Properly taking care of your puppets will allow you to use them for a very long time thus allowing you to utilize your funds for other things. I still have puppets that are more than 20 years old and are still just as usable as they were when I first got them.

Here are some helpful tips for insuring that your puppets stay in great condition and last for many years:

Keep your puppets from getting dirty

This is especially important for puppets that have skin (non-fur fabric), like the human puppets with flesh-colored fabrics. Also, any puppet made with a light colored fabric or fur that can show stains easily. This is a rule no matter what the material is they are made of. Obviously, puppets are going to get a little dirty over time just from general usage, but

try to keep your puppets from getting dirty whenever possible. When practicing, always remember to lay the puppets down in their storage boxes or on a **puppet tree** and not on floors where they will come into contact with soil and dust or on tables and chairs where they can get knocked into the floor or picked up by someone who may not be the cleanest person to be handling them.

You can also use fabric protectors such as Scotch guard to help keep stains to a minimum. Remember to always test a small spot on the puppet in a not so visible place first before spraying the entire puppet because some fabrics will have issues with bleeding and staining. My spot of choice is along the lower back around where your hand usually enters. Wait half an hour to see if there are any issues with color fastness and if not then lightly wipe the area with a warm damp cloth to see if there is any color transfer. Also, avoid spraying eyes. This will cause a film to develop on the eyes, which will start yellowing the eyes over time.

Have a designated storage space for puppets

Having a designated storage place specifically for your puppets will keep them in better condition as well as it makes them easier to get to when you need them. This could be stackable totes, puppet trees or something more permanent.

When not in use, I highly recommend having them under lock and key. Puppets are just one of those things that screams “*PLAY WITH ME*” and they have a way of *moving* when no one is around.

One example of this is at a church ministry that I worked with in which the children’s pastor would occasionally find puppets all over the place, including the church parking lot. It is easy to regulate how puppets are handled in a controlled situation such as team practice, but unknowns “borrowing” your puppets do not know or care to abide by the rules.

Properly storing puppets is important

What I find that works best are the clear plastic totes with snap on lids. If you do not want to make this investment, at least get some cardboard boxes with lids. While you are at it, label the boxes according and properly maintain what puppet is in what box. Do the same with props and this will make it easier when you need to find a certain puppet or prop item. I always try to line the box with felt so that **burnishing** doesn’t take place and create slick spots on the fabric surface of the puppet. Don’t smash puppets together when placing them in a box. On larger puppets especially, I try to have individual storage containers for each, so that the puppets do not rub together. If multiple puppets are stuffed into one box they can sometimes get eyes snagging together, hair knots, etc. By doing it this way you, often times, will have room to store extra costumes for that puppet.

Turn the puppet face downward into the container so that the surface-to-surface contact will be the back of the puppet, unless you want to add felt to the lid as well. Do not store with the arm rods or any other accessories attached. If you do store any of these in the same box with the puppet, make sure that they are wrapped so there will be little chance of them making direct contact with the puppet.

Now, as far as stationary storage is concerned, for instance, in an on site church ministry or a puppet theatre, then the best way is to have your puppets on a puppet tree or rack for easy access and little chance of them getting smashed or burnished.

Later we will discuss how to build these. They take very little effort to build and save a lot of maintenance time on the puppets. When using puppet trees, if the puppet is on the post for any length of time unused, it is best to cover it with a clear plastic trash bag so as to keep dust from collecting on it.

Check for early signs of wear and tear

Every time that you pull out the puppet, whether for practice or for performance, always give the puppets a good once-over to be sure there are no signs of rips, tears or stains. If you do find these signs, take care of the situation immediately.

Keep common sense in mind

Don't have food and drinks behind the puppet stage. I have seen so many issues with puppets getting trashed because someone spilled a drink back stage during a performance and the puppet had to set with the stain on it until the performance was over which caused the stain to set in. I recall a situation once with a cherry drink and the new carpet of a church that the team was performing at as well.

Wash hands before handling puppets. Dirty or not, oils from your hands will allow bacteria to grow inside of the puppet, collect dirt on the outside of the puppet, and transfer viruses if the puppet is used by multiple team members during a given period of less than 3 hours.

If working outdoors, try to have an area where you can store the puppets without them being in direct contact with the ground or the sun.

For the puppets protection, do not let puppeteers take puppets home to practice. The puppeteer may be the most responsible person you know, but accidents happen and chances are, there are other people in the house that aren't as responsible.

Picking up and carrying your puppet

Along with proper storage, it is important that you properly handle your puppets when transporting them. By improperly transporting puppets, you run a greater risk of damage and undue wear and tear. So here are a few guidelines on transporting a puppet.

Never pick a puppet up by its appendages (arms, legs, nose, hair, ears, etc.). This eventually leads to loose stitches that can be a pain to redo.

Always pick up your puppet by the neck in a way that the lower jaw is supported on your hand and never carry your puppet by any of the aforementioned appendages, as this, too will lead to pulled stitches.

Always carry the puppet on your hand as if you are about to perform with it or have the head draped over your arm so as not to put any direct pressure on the head or mouth area, while holding the body close to you for added support.

Horseplay

Since we are discussing care of the puppets, this is a good time to mention something about **horseplay**. This is especially an issue when dealing with younger and/or untrained puppeteers. They like to play rough with the puppets. This is not acceptable. This damages more puppets than I could ever count and is a number one reason for puppet wear and tear, plus it sets bad examples. With the rules that I set up, this is an offense that could get you kicked off of the team. I try to keep all of my receipts for purchases with my puppets and props. I realize that accidents happen, but when it is obvious damage from horseplay, the individual responsible will be off of the team for a month and whatever performance is being held next they will sit out on, and if the damage is severe, I give them a copy of the receipt and they pay damages before they are allowed back on the team.

Harsh? Maybe, but what is worse, a puppeteer that learns from their mistake and never makes it again, a puppeteer who doesn't want to follow the rules and decides that they no longer wish to be a part of the team, or a damaged puppet with a puppeteer that will continue to do so to other puppets in the future? Professionalism is the key and there is no room for horseplay on a professional team.

Cleaning the surface

If you take proper care of your puppets, then cleaning will be a few and far between process that will take little time. Preventative maintenance is the key to keeping your puppets as good as new.

To clean your puppets will require a couple of drops of mild dishwashing liquid (my product of choice is Dawn, because it is some of the mildest on the market that I have worked with) per 8 ounces of lukewarm water. This mix is to be lightly worked into the area being cleaned with a soft bristled toothbrush and blotted afterwards with a dry towel.

Note: the area that you clean will be a lighter or brighter shade than the rest of the puppet, so it always looks better to clean the entire puppet using the above procedures so that the entire puppet has the same appearance.

Cleaning the eyes

This generally depends on what type of eyes the puppet has. Usually most puppets have plastic eyes, so you can use the same method as previously mentioned to lightly scrub in small circular patterns.

Another way of cleaning the puppet's eyes, if they are glass or the plastic googly eyes is to apply a non-ammonia based window cleaner and wipe off with a lens cloth. Make sure not to spray the cleaner directly on to the eyes due to the fact that the over spray will get onto the puppet and discolor the surface. Use eyeglass cleaning cloths or a soft makeup sponge to apply the cleaner.

Keeping the Hair Maintained

Hair is one of the first things that can make a puppet look shabby if not kept properly. Always keep a small children's brush or semi soft bristled doll brush just for use on the puppet's hair before storing and before every performance. When needed, wipe down the hair with a slightly damp cloth to remove dust. If the hair requires combing, do so with a dampened children's brush or comb and then follow it up with a wipe down with a slightly dampened cloth. This will remove static and keep the hair manageable.

After general care, at least once a month, spray with light glazes of hair spray. Do NOT use an aerosol hair spray. As most puppet hair is synthetic and the components from the aerosol can actually harm the hair. Also, make sure to shield the rest of the puppet before spraying so that over spray does not become an issue.

At this time is bares mentioning again, that this would be a good opportunity to inspect your puppet for rips, tears, scuffs, loose stitching, etc.

Mildew control

Especially during long performances, puppeteers will sweat a lot inside of a puppet's head. If not kept clean, the interior of the puppet can begin to grow mildew and other types of bacteria. I was once restoring a puppet for a ministry in Texas and detached the head so that I could insert a new **mouth plate**; in taking it a part, the entire interior was black with mold and mildew. The bad news is that this cannot be completely avoided, but it can be maintained and kept under control.

One way is to keep an old tube sock or small beanbag type pouch with baby powder in it (I prefer the medicated powder because it also has the ability to kill certain types of bacteria). After each use of the puppet, lightly pat the entire inside, making sure to get up

in the head and mouth. This will help assist in quickly drying out the interior of the puppet.

Once a month, spray the interior of the puppet with Lysol. Do not over spray. If you soak the interior of the puppet, it will soak through to the outside and stain the puppet. Also, if you have an older puppet or less expensive puppet, there is a good chance the mouth plate is felt covered cardboard and too much spray will cause it to start breaking down, as any wet paper product will do.

There are just some people who will sweat profusely no matter what they are wearing, so something that will help keep sweat out of the puppets is to have these people wear thin gloves to absorb the sweat and then just wash the gloves later or even have them wear latex gloves and just throw them away after each time.

If you take care of your puppet, it will last a really long time, which will save you money in the long run that can be reinvested in growing your team.