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NBC's 'Tonight Show' host once performed as 'Great Carsoni'

Johnny Carson, the popular host of NBC's "Tonight Show" who died in January at age 79, was a magician who sometimes performed on the late night television show.

A native of Iowa who was raised in Nebraska, Carson began his show business career at age 14 performing magic at local Rotary, Elks, Moose and Redmen lodges using the stage name "The Great Carsoni."



Carson



'Carsoni'

Carson read "Hoffmann's Book of Magic" at age 12 and liked it so much that he sent away for a mail order magic set. He began learning card tricks and other magical effects. He performed

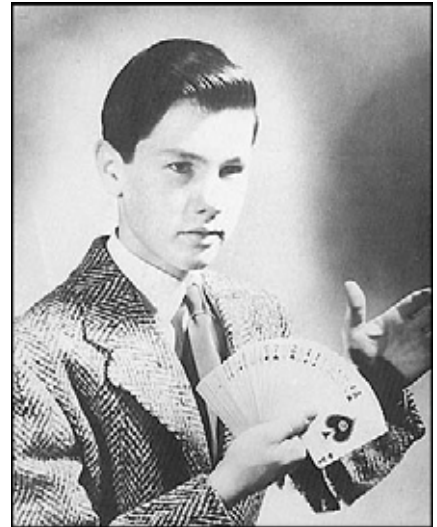
for family members whenever he could get someone to watch. He was intrigued by the stories he read about Harry Houdini. He also was intrigued by a traveling magician called "Mortoni" who came to his home town.

When Carson decided to call himself "The Great Carsoni," his mother created a black cloth with the name embroidered on it to drape on a magic table. She gave it to him when he turned 13. He used it when he made his professional debut the next year



As a young father, Carson performed a magic trick for his three sons.

in his home town of Norfolk, Neb., before the Rotary Club. He earned \$3 for his first performance. At the time he retired from the "Tonight Show" he was making millions of dollars.



When he was a teen-ager, Carson began doing a magic act for civic clubs.

Because Carson was an accomplished amateur magician and one of the most powerful people in television, he gave a tremendous boost to the popularity of magic by often featuring top magicians on the Tonight Show.

For several years running, Carson's New Year's Eve show featured Lance Burton. Other magicians appearing on the show were Don Alan, Michael Ammar, Harry Anderson, Carl Ballentine, Harry Blackstone Jr., Walter Blaney, Johnathon Neal Brown, Carazini, Dick Cavett, David Copperfield, Dean Dill, Joseph Gabriel, Uri Geller, Paul Gertner, Brian Gillis, Goldfinger & Dove, Albert Goshman, Jimmy Grippo, Johnny Hart, Pat Hazell, Doug Henning, Ricky Jay, Kreskin, Harry Lorayne, Steve Martin, Chris Michaels, Scot Morris, Penn & Teller, James Randi, Randall Richmond, Marvyn Roy, Shimada, Michael Skinner, Johnny Thompson, Orson Welles and Mark Wilson.

AP Photos via Internet