

# A&M alumnus strips, earns title of 'Mr. Burlesque 1988'

HOUSTON (AP) — He says God gave him that body. And God might not be terribly pleased about what Ronnie McQuinn, 23, does with it.

"I know that I encourage lust," Mr. Burlesque 1988 said. "And that's a sin."

He paused. He sighed. He bowed his head and contemplated the blob of ravioli still left on his plate.

He doesn't eat much. Small meals, maybe six times a day. But he can eat just about anything he wants, McQuinn said, without getting flabby. It must be because of all those years of kick-boxing training. And he lifts weights now and then.

But mainly, he dances.

"God gave me these abs (abdominal muscles). No matter what I do, they just seem to rip," he'd said earlier, during the limousine ride to the restaurant.

"But I believe in a forgiving God," McQuinn said quietly, locking his brown eyes on yours with a look that just dares you to doubt his sincerity.

Anyway, shedding most of his clothes for hordes of adoring women is only the first step toward his ultimate goal. "I want to leave my great-grandchildren

**The women you see are secretaries, teachers. Women you've looked up to all your life as prim and proper. When they come into a male strip club, a metamorphosis takes place.**

**Ronnie McQuinn, Mr. Burlesque 1988**

lots of money," McQuinn said.

And along the way, "I want to be the next Robert Redford."

Ambitious goals are what separate the stars from the mere sex objects on the male stripping circuit, according to Wayne Wheat, who booked the "Ice-man," McQuinn's stage name, into Houston's only male strip club, Le Bare, for a recent engagement.

Wheat ought to know. He parlayed an

impulsive prank, while he was a student at Texas A&M, into a stripping career that included an appearance on "Donahue" in 1984.

He and an Aggie buddy entered a dance contest on roller skates. "Somebody gave us a pair of shorts that had Velcro seams. I didn't even know what Velcro was. But at the end of the act, I ripped those shorts off and the crowd went nuts." The pair won the \$350 prize. "And I knew I'd never have to work again for college money," Wheat said.

Today, he and his wife, Kathryn, manage a stable of male strippers known as the Le Bare World Tour. The group finished third at the recent Myrtle Beach, S.C. competition where McQuinn scored his second Mr. Burlesque title, outstripping 80 competitors in the individual category.

Last year, Mr. Burlesque promoters told McQuinn he could use the name even though they didn't hold the contest. Is he that good?

"There aren't many guys who have good bodies AND that can dance," Kathryn Wheat said, nodding her head.

It's a young business. Most guys take to the stage right out of high school, lured by easy money and the novelty of being mobbed by adoring women. Wheat retired to management at the ripe old age of 26, after stripping for several years at the original Houston Le Bare club on San Felipe. The club recently reopened at 6447 Richmond Ave. after a six-month hiatus.

Le Bare lost its lease at the original location at the end of last year due, in part, to a highly publicized raid in 1986. Law officers threw a bride-to-be in jail for what they said was too much touching of a performer.

Since then, Wheat said, the dancers have adopted strict rules designed to keep their reputations from going the way of their female colleagues. No touching themselves in strategic places. No lingering touches of patrons. And nothing more than a peck on the cheek when it comes to the kisses the good tippers seek.

And yes, girls, there is nearly as much dancing as flesh to admire. A few Le Bare acts, including a convincing Michael Jackson impersonator, feature fully clothed performers. In one, the dancers don't even unknit their ties.

McQuinn learned his steps after kick-boxing practice sessions at the Fort Myers, Fla., gym where he spent most of his youth, when he wasn't attending the Pentecostal church where his parents still pray that his current career will end soon.

"I was one of two white guys," he said of those days at the gym. But he learned to break-dance with the best of the blacks. They gave him his stage name, "because they said I moved as if I was dancing on ice."

He wanted to kick-box in the 1980 Olympics, but the U.S. boycott scotched that. So he joined the Air Force on a recruiter's promise that he'd be a shoo-in for the service boxing team.

Instead, McQuinn got stuck managing recreation facilities at a Myrtle Beach, S.C. base. But he kept dancing, gleaching choreography from the dance instructors he booked for the officers' club on weekends.

While still in the service, McQuinn entered dance contests at the local night spots. After winning all the ones where competitors kept their clothes on, he tried a few "bikini" contests.

He was humiliated. It was that military crew cut. And he had tan lines in all the wrong places, McQuinn said.

So he vowed revenge. The minute he finished his Air Force stint, he began growing his (naturally) blond mane and exposing his rear to the sun's rays. When he went back to the strip clubs, he found he was getting paid for being mobbed by women.

"The women you see are secretaries, teachers," McQuinn said. "Women you've looked up to all your life as prim and proper. When they come into a male strip club, a metamorphosis takes place."

The novelty of being a male sex object, however, soon takes second place to the appeal of the tips women slip into a dancer's G-string, McQuinn and Wheat agreed. A good dancer can make a couple of hundred dollars an evening, in addition to the appearance fee he's paid by a promotional tour organizer like Le Bare.

But you've got to wear more than a G-string at the Le Bare club, Wheat told the Mr. Burlesque. Quirk of local lewdness laws, he explained. The club's new location is too close to Robert E. Lee High School to let the dancers show so much derriere that they'd qualify the business as sexually oriented.

McQuinn was aghast. The restriction could ruin the effect of his showstopping "ice cream man" routine, where he strips from a white suit to a glittering blue vest and chaps to a gem-studded sling called a T-bar that's only slightly less revealing than a G-string.

Don't worry, Wheat assures him. The club has a stash of multicolored weightlifters' posing briefs that keep the dancers in compliance with the local ordinance.

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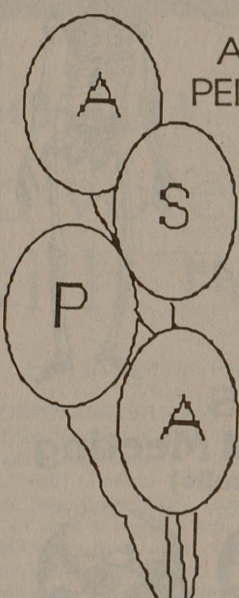
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## Passion for birds not flighty affair for Texas resident

BROWNSVILLE (AP) — Strange noises coming from the house of David "Bird Man" McKelvey tend to ruffle the feathers of his neighbors.

A new neighbor became increasingly distressed one day recently by loud crying she heard coming from his home. She insisted that McKelvey's daughter would be crying all day.

"I said, 'I doubt it. She's 19 and in college in Pennsylvania,'" McKelvey said.

The neighbor persisted, refusing to believe that all the ruckus was coming from a parrot.

"She wouldn't believe it until I got Evita to cry," he said.

Evita, an adult parrot, is just one of McKelvey's scores of feathered friends. He has more than 50 birds at home and 500 more at work.

McKelvey, the new bird curator at the Gladys Porter Zoo, is a life-long aviary aficionado and perhaps is just a little bit of a looney bird himself. He can train birds to do almost anything, which has led to guest appearances on the Johnny Carson and David Letterman television shows, as well as Captain Kangaroo, Mister Rogers, the Today Show and others, "Childressers."

Evita, for instance, can sing the complete lyrics to "Don't Cry For Me, Argentina" and "Rock of Ages." She says things like, "Kitty, kitty, kitty, kitty, meow," "Give me a kiss," "Whatcha doing, huh?," "Are you being careful?" "Help! Help! Let me out!," "I wanna fly way, way, way, way up there," and "I wanna macho bird."

She tells McKelvey's dingo Ripper to "Shut up," mimicks chickens and frogs; and when she finishes, "Rock of Ages," she says, "Let us pray, mother."

"With Evita I never taught her any profanity or any psychedelically oriented phraseology. . . . But when your parrot sits up in a tree and sings all of an old Baptist hymn, that beats 'Pretty bird, pretty bird,'" he said.

Evita also paints.

"She doesn't paint representational stuff," McKelvey said. "She simply takes the paint brush in her beak and dabbles it around on the paper, and after a few minutes she gets tired of that and eats the paint brush."

Birds have captured his fascination since he was a young boy. McKelvey,

now 49, remembers becoming spell-bound by pigeons' mating when he was bed-ridden with chicken pox at age 6, and soon after nursing a young robin to health and then adulthood.

"My parents assured me (the robin) would die, but I raised him to a perfectly healthy adult robin and that kind of got me into the curiosity about raising birds in captivity," McKelvey said.

Keeping birds in cages never appealed to McKelvey.

"Once they were fledged and able to care for themselves I was more interested in them as friends and subjects of intellectual curiosity rather than as possessions, so this is why zoos appeal to me so much nowadays," he said.

"It's more than just something in a cage. It's a conservation and teaching effort and an aesthetic experience. You now own an animal for a reason."

Thus McKelvey naturally migrated toward ornithology and began working in zoos in 1962.

He was curator of birds at the San Antonio Zoo from 1977 to 1982, but spent the last six years writing children's books (with animal protagonists), painting and lecturing.

"I was making \$300 a day lecturing in schools," McKelvey said, laughing. "I should've stayed in that."

McKelvey learned his profession through hands-on experience, he says.

"A good curator is not just someone with a degree in blood parasites in starlings," he said. "A good curator is someone who knows all about the process of keeping, raising and exhibiting animals and you don't get that in college. You have to have hands-on experience."

"Animal people," McKelvey said, range from professional sorts who know species' third Latin names "but probably couldn't identify one if it jumped up on their desk," to people who don't know what the Latin names mean but would wrestle down an antelope to be medicated without a second thought.

Although humans don't usually rate birds highly on the intelligence scale, McKelvey, who can mimic over 300 animal sounds, believes birds are the easiest of all creatures to train.

"The birds perform because they want that food reward and that affection reward that goes with (the trick). You know at any given time they could check out if they don't like the working conditions."

3 llamas find home with Odessa family

ODESSA (AP) — Lions and tigers and llamas, oh my.

Maybe llamas will never trot down the yellow brick road with Dorothy and the Scarecrow, but they have trotted into Odessa.

Danny and Janie Pradon of west Odessa are the proud owners of three adult llamas, two males and a female.

"One of the male llamas, we just never named," Mrs. Pradon said. "The female we call Mama. Mama Llama. The second male we named Hey. Actually, we didn't name him that. I just started yelling 'Hey!' and he answered and it stuck."

As Mrs. Pradon watched, her husband tried to lure the animals to the fence with a can of feed. But they weren't interested.

"We got one of the males at an exotic animal sale in Harper, Texas," Mrs. Pradon said. "Males cost between \$400 and \$1,000. The females will run anywhere from \$3,000 to \$10,000. They're a lot harder to come by because people use them for breeding."

Llamas were first bred in South Amer-

ica from the wild guanaco and used as pack animals. With heights of 4 to 5 feet, the llama has thick, long, coarse hair that can be brown, buff, gray, white or black.

The Pradons bought their first llama because it was an out-of-the-ordinary pet and a good buy.

"Then we found out how expensive the females were," the Pradons added. Their one female expects her first calf in two months.

Llamas were bred to work in both the cold mountains and the hot flatlands, so they can easily adapt to the unpredictable West Texas weather.

"They're very easy to care for," said Mrs. Pradon, who tends the animals on the couple's 14-acre farm while her husband works.

Llamas can survive on field grass and weeds, but the Pradons add alfalfa hay and sweet feed — a mixture of grains and honey, carrots and apples — to their llamas' diets. Like their cousin the camel, llamas do not need much water. When they're grazing, they only need water about twice a week, Mrs. Pradon said.

Llamas are also neater than most animals.

"They like to go to the bathroom in the same place, like a cat in a litter box," Mrs. Pradon said. "Even if they happen to be on the other side of the field, they'll just take off running to their bathroom."

Llamas can be unpredictable.

Llama owner David Terk of Odessa thinks llamas are interesting and unusual animals, but he also believes they aren't for everyone.

"They can be dangerous," he said. "They can be aggressive, especially the males. They can bite and kick. It's just like having any other large animal. This doesn't mean they're all bad. It just means there are a lot of people who shouldn't have them."

But some owners disagree.

"They're very gentle animals," said Mrs. Pradon, who recommends them as family pets. "They don't react by kicking or biting the way horses do. And they're easy to train. Suddenly, after the third time you make them do something, they know what it is you want them to do."

Llamas are known to spit when they're angry, however.

"They do spit," Pradon said, "but about the only time they do it is when you pressure them or get them into a corner."

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Neimans prepares to fill stockings

DALLAS (AP) — That winter wish list for well-stocked wallets, the Neiman Marcus Christmas Book, this year proves that not everything is better in pairs, providing a lift for Yuletide spirits with a "his-OR-hers" hot-air balloon.

But the company that introduced his-AND-hers camels, dilligibles and Spangled Cats is not saying that togetherness is out of vogue with the affluent.

Featured in the catalog is the Neiman Marcus Cloudhopper, a 30-foot hot-air balloon that fits into an automobile trunk or the back of its owner.

"We only have one balloon, the Cloudhopper," company spokesman Pat Zajac said. "Only one can ride in it. Of course, if 20 people want one, that's no problem. We are prepared to provide as many Cloudhoppers as the world wants."

Constructed by Per Lindstrand of Thunder & Colt Balloons, England, the "fantasy of free-flight" sells for a mere \$18,000.

Lindstrand, Zajac said, was the first man to cross the Atlantic in a hot-air balloon.

"We always look for things that are unexpected, unusual," Zajac said, "and this is the world's first backpack balloon."

"It's the most compact balloon ever offered to the public," he said. "It's a backpack balloon that fits in the trunk of a car as a whole unit."

Not all the catalog gifts are for loners.

The upscale "Easy Rider" can hit the road with other bikers on a limited edition Harley-Davidson Heritage Softail motorcycle with customized seat, matching helmet and his-ors-hers black leather jacket with silver studs.

"Malcolm Forbes would love it," Zajac said, referring to

the publishing magnate who owns a collection of motorcycles.

"You are seeing more CEOs and business people out on the road with their motorcycles," she said.

"Liz Taylor loves the color purple," she said. "Malcolm has supplied her with her own violet motorcycle."

The wanderlust may strike Christmas shoppers in a more down-to-earth way.

For \$25,000, you can take a 10-day bicycle tour of Italy's Tuscany Region on custom Cinelli touring bikes, which may be personalized with your monogram or family crest.

The romantic tour for two, "the Tuscany Gran Turismo," comes with a deluxe motor coach and a driver-guide to accompany the riders, who can room at luxurious country inns and villas through the trip.

This year, the Neiman Marcus gift selection contains a touch of humor and whimsy.

There's a silver-plated baby bottle for a budding corporate chief executive officer at \$25.

"We have taken the baby from silver spoon in mouth to bottle," Zajac said.

Other novelties include an edible chocolate chess set, giant milk-and-white-chocolate postage stamp replicas, brooches of metal and precious stones depicting official birds of the 50 states and a set of howling coyote salt and pepper shakers, handmade in Albuquerque by a native artist.

Zajac said 3.2 million N-M catalogs were mailed to shoppers worldwide this fall.

"Through the years, we have tried to appeal to the humor and the child in all of us," he said.

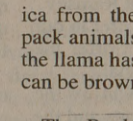
"If nothing else, it is a wish book for those who read it," she said.

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