



## **You Are Getting Sleepy....**

*Burlington Hypnotist Pulls an All-Nighter at Four High School Graduation Parties*

By Erica Jacobson, Burlington Free Press Staff

MILTON, VT - With wireless microphone in hand, Steve Taubman strode back and forth across the auditorium stage at Milton High School on Saturday night, and the sound of his soothing voice soaked the room. His target sponges were the 18 teen-agers seated behind him with their eyes fixed on the ceiling and their palms opened upward and resting on their legs.

Sitting still is one of the last things you'd expect from graduates on the first night of their post-high-school life. Neither is showing up 20 minutes early to a 9:15 p.m. assembly when there's no way you can ever receive another detention. Yet almost 30 newly designated MHS alums and a few present students waited for Taubman, a Burlington hypnotist, to take the stage. And almost twice as many as he had seats for leapt up when he called for volunteers during the first event of the school's Project Graduation all-night party.

Really, who could blame them?

Taubman's woozy wizardry promised potential hypnotees a chance to shut down their conscious selves and talk a wild walk on their unconscious side. Driving the volunteers deeper and deeper into relaxation with his calming words, Taubman continued a countdown from 10 to zero.

"We're going to take all other thoughts, all other sounds and all other voices," Taubman cooed, "and put them just as if they're a million miles away."

At six, one girl had slumped sleepily into the lap of the boy seated next to her. Taubman asked everyone to close their eyes at five, and the white bandanna-clad head of another boy flopped between his knees when Taubman's count hit two.

Taubman then talked his hypnotized group into a mind-scape of a sunny beach where guys waved to imaginary girls and girls smiled shyly at figmentary fellows checking them out. Content with the reactions, Taubman talked some tension into the scene. Everyone had a terrible sunburn, and the group itched until Taubman delivered imaginary dollops of cream. Then, he ratcheted up the rhetoric, and it became the hottest day they had ever known, his voice nudging the temperature up toward torrid.

The audience laughed as 18-year-old Clark Morrison of Milton wriggled as he lay on stage. The hypnotized MHS grad peeled off his yellow T-shirt to adjust for the sudden climactic change. "It's 105 in the shade," Taubman teased, "and there is no shade."

### *Stacked Schedule*

Teen-agers, graduates, Vermonters lend Steve Taubman your imagination for an hour and he'll make you forget your name and have you think you've lost your bellybutton.

Give the chiropractor turned trained hypnotist seven hours on the busiest high school graduation party night of the year say, oh, 9 p.m. Saturday through 5 a.m. Sunday, for instance and he cuts a swath through four high schools celebrating at four different locations. Left in the wake of Taubman's Hypnosis extravaganza are tens of teens who have taken their turns as orchestra conductors, goldfish or manic, 1,000-word-per-minute typists and three times as many spectators who have laughed until they physically ached.

With a schedule like that, it's no wonder his Dodge Caravan with its "URSLPY" license plates has logged almost 12,000 miles in less than six months. The pace might exhaust anyone else arriving at Milton High School just after 8 p.m., scooting over to Racquet's Edge in Essex Junction for the Harwood Union High School performance by 11 p.m., motoring up to Jericho Center in time for Mount Mansfield Union High School's show at 12:45 a.m. and finishing up his work day in Warren for Spaulding High School's turn at Sugarbush Health & Racquet Club.

Still, it's ironic that during a time when so many graduates desperately want to remember every moment, they turn to Taubman. After all, his show isn't successful if it doesn't regularly leave its participants with little or no recollection of what happened to them during their hour on the stage.

### *Halfway Home*

Halfway through the Harwood Union High School show, class of 2000 valedictorian T.J. Berrings became angry. Real angry.

"What the hell's going on?" the 18-year-old grad from Waterbury shouted at the audience of his fellow graduates.

They hadn't done anything, though. It was Taubman who interrupted the hypnotized Berrings' and eight former classmates' viewing of an imaginary most-romantic movie ever by saying the reel had broken without the projectionist even noticing.

Before starting the second show of the evening, Taubman had told the grads gathered on the basketball court at Racquet's Edge that people often asked if he was going to make them do anything strange, silly, weird or different.

"That's pretty much the idea," Taubman told the teens.

It's somewhat odd that teen-agers, who are occasionally infamous for resisting suggestions, would volunteer to listen to suggestions that make them look silly. But Taubman said teens and college students exhibit the intense concentration and extreme focus that make them perfect for his shows.

"They're not jaded," Taubman said. "They haven't developed the need not to look stupid."

That said, it was nothing for 18-year-old Kim LaMaster to leap from the stage during the MMU show and demand the black flip-flop of a friend after Taubman told her group they were secret agents who needed to answer shoe phones in the audience.

"Move your knees," the Jericho resident demanded of 17-year-old Katie Livingstone of Underhill. "I need the phone that's ringing. It's for me."

Once she had swiped the shoe, LaMaster put it to her ear, said "Hello" and ran up through the school's auditorium to have her secret conversation.

### *Final Follies*

The Sugarbush Health & Racquet Club was Taubman's last stop for the evening. On a tarp-covered indoor tennis court, the class of 2000 from Barre's Spaulding High School completely missed the day's dawning in favor of the finale of Taubman's show.

"All that happened here," Taubman said, standing center stage in front of 12 slumped-over and entranced teens, "is that these people became so relaxed that they were able to access their subconscious minds."

Like the three previous shows, Taubman ended his show with the 12 subjects believing they had just won the International Sexy Dancing Competition. The teens bumped and ground away to the Vengaboys song "We Like to Party" as their nonhypnotized fellow graduates clapped along.

As Taubman cut the music and said "Awake" for the last time, the newly aware grads flocked to join groups of their friends.

"I don't remember anything I did," 17-year-old Julie Kepnes-Letourneau said.

No problem the Barre girl's friends were more than happy to fill her in on how she had clambered onto the lap of Roy Belcher, an 18-year-old former classmate also from Barre, during a segment when the group supposedly was watching the most romantic movie they had ever seen. And then there was how she absolutely couldn't remember her name. And how about when Kepnes-Letourneau really believed the DJ was Ben Affleck, even going as far as dragging him in front of the audience and introducing him as the actor.

With each additional detail, Kepnes-Letourneau's eyes widened and her hands crept over her face to cover her nose and mouth. Here it was, one of the most memorable nights of her life, and she couldn't recall at least an hour's worth of actions in front of her former classmates.

"As long as I entertained everyone else," Kepnes-Letourneau said, "I guess it's OK."

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