

# Creativity as cure: The Wump Mucket Puppet show

**Garin Pirnia**  
Enquirer contributor

Terrence Burke's personal tragedy began in January 2001 when he found his father dead in their Oakley family home.

He explains that the death was a "kick in the stomach" and "I was miserable. Nothing was going right. I wasn't doing anything creative."

Realizing he was depressed beyond sadness, Burke took his wife's suggestion that he see a psychiatrist. As Burke remembers it, the doctor asked him what makes him happy and, without much thought, Burke blurted out: "Puppets."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" the doctor lobbed back.

The doctor had Burke read the book *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* by David D. Burns, but Burke realized talking to his wife, sister and mother was more beneficial.

"They helped me realize that I was someone who mattered in the world," he says. "I found that if I channeled the negative/self-destructive feelings that I was having about myself into creative projects (drawing puppets, writing songs, writing skits), that I felt better."

Burke took advantage of the opportunity to start drawing again and made the decision to "make other people happy instead of sitting in the dark cloud. Once I started, there was no looking back. When I feel down these days, I look back at who I was 15 years ago and tell myself that I have made incredible progress."

Burke expelled the miasma and founded Northside's Wump Mucket Puppets in 2010. Last fall, Wright State University film student Sean W. Mangan asked if he could chronicle Burke's transformation, from a man having suicidal thoughts to becoming one of the area's most sought-after local puppeteers.

"I wanted to find someone who specialized in areas of pop culture that aren't brought up in everyday conversation and see how and why a person would choose to pursue that career," Mangan says. "My approach to the film was to try and capture what Terrence's experience of being a puppeteer was like and to try and translate his love of puppets to the audience in a consumable format. I wanted to show the audience that there's a lot of heart and soul that goes into entertainment, even if it's supposed to be for kids."

Mangan spent a few days filming Burke at shows in Indiana and Kentucky and interviewed Burke and his family at their Northside home. The



Terrence Burke, with his creations and the kids who love them.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MICHELLE BURRIS JELISON

almost 10-minute documentary, *A Show of Hands*, screened at WSU in February, and will have its local debut June 7 at the Northside branch of the Public Library. "Everyone seems to get something out of the film, which is my first priority as a filmmaker," Mangan says.

Burke grew up in Boston and Andover, Massachusetts, then moved here in the 1980s. He moved back to Massachusetts briefly but then he and his wife settled permanently in Cincinnati in 1993 to be closer to his dad. A father-son trip to a puppetry festival in 1970 inspired Burke to get into puppets. As a result, in middle school, Burke played with puppets but was bullied for that by unkind classmates.

"Being that impressionable age of 13, 14 years old, I put (the puppets) all in a box and joined the soccer club to try to fit in, and I didn't fit in," Burke says.

Burke found other ways to be creative. He did community theater, started a local music zine called *Screed*, and, like his father, worked in radio. But when he found himself using his father's death as a catalyst to rethink puppetry, all the pieces fit.

"To hear the laughter behind the stage and then to meet the children afterward, it makes me happy and makes me realize that this is something that I'm meant to do." Burke sees himself as both an educator and as a showman.

"When I was a boy, I wanted to know how Oscar the Grouch came out of a trash can on *Sesame Street*," he says about his one-man show. "Children are very interested in how seven puppets are in my show and will often ask, 'Where are the other puppe-

teers?'"

All of his puppets evolve from Burke's personality. Cyril the Sea Serpent represents the practical parent/leader of the group. The popcorn-loving Coleman the Sasquatch mimics Burke's inner child who "loves to kid around and tell cheesy jokes." Other characters like Unka Unka the cave-man allow him to integrate his love for the Marx Brothers and the Three Stooges' physical comedy into the show.

Burke says after his performances, some of the kids will approach Burke and hug the puppets, others will linger behind. He doesn't

## IF YOU GO

**What:** *A Show of Hands* premiere  
**When:** 6:30 p.m. Tuesday  
**Where:** Public Library of Cincinnati's Northside Branch, 4219 Hamilton Ave.  
**Tickets:** Free,  
wumpmuckerpuppets.com/

use his puppetry platform to address bullying or other serious issues, but the puppets are still used as positive tools.

Burke and his puppets perform 55 shows a year, for audiences ranging from 3-year-olds to 93-year-olds. Every year the troupe grows, and he's able to make a decent living at puppetry.

Right before every performance, Burke pays homage to his father. "I think of him daily, and then when I'm going on the stage," he says, "I thank him for taking me to that puppetry festival as a child and encouraging me."

Member of **JOSEPH AUTO GROUP**

# 1000 USED CARS!

**josephauto.com**

Ask Your Neighbor...  
They Bought From Us!



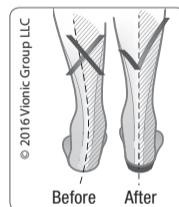
Terrence Burke and Cyril, the Sea Serpent. A short film about how Burke came to be a puppeteer debuts Tuesday.

## Podiatrist-designed sandals align your body from the ground up



**FREE SHIPPING & FREE RETURNS**  
on this item\*

VIONIC  
WALK. MOVE. LIVE.



Acclaimed Australian podiatrist, Phillip Vasyli, invented Orthaheel Technology, with built-in Tri-Planar motion control, to help restore your natural footprint, improving gait and posture. Just like the tires on a car, improper foot alignment can cause heel pain as well as wear and tear to other parts of the body including knees, hips and lower back. Built-in orthotic footbeds, leather and webbing uppers and durable rubber outsoles. Women's Medium (B-C), sizes 5-12 in 12 colors/patterns. Men's Medium (D-E), sizes 7-13 in 3 colors. Whole sizes only. For half sizes, order next size down. Visit [www.footsmart.com/tide](http://www.footsmart.com/tide) to view colors.

Try Vionic Tide orthotic sandals risk-free. If you're not satisfied, simply return them within 60 days for a full refund.

Women's	<del>\$64.99</del>	Vionic® with Orthaheel® Technology
		75115 Women's Tide II
Men's	<del>\$69.99</del>	74205 Men's Tide

Use promo code **ALIGN197** to receive free standard shipping/free returns\*  
To order, visit [footsmart.com/tide](http://footsmart.com/tide) or call **1-866-222-4801**

# FootSmart®

embrace your feet®

\*This offer may not be combined with other promotional offers or applied to previously placed orders. Offer expires June 12, 2016. Expedited delivery charges and additional shipping charges to APO/FPO addresses, Alaska, Hawaii and U.S. Territories are not included in the Free Shipping offer. To be accepted for return, item must be in original, unworn condition. For free returns/exchanges, use the convenient SmartLabel™ sent with your order at no charge. SmartLabel can be used in continental US only and cannot be used with cash/check or PayPal orders. For complete return policy, visit [www.footsmart.com/returns-exchanges](http://www.footsmart.com/returns-exchanges).