

# Courtroom wizardry is natural for magician

By LOIS COOPER

Gregory Victoroff of Cleveland Heights, who's been pulling rabbits out of hats since he was in elementary school, performed his most accomplished feat recently. But it was done with mind, not magic.

The professional magician turned law student was part of a three-member Cleveland State University team which won all the awards at the 1978 Niagara International Moot Court Competition in Toronto.

The trick, explained Victoroff, was to argue a problem in a simulated courtroom situation — and to do it better than any other team.

VICTOROFF, TOGETHER WITH two other second-year classmates at CSU's Cleveland Marshall College of Law — Christine Covey and M. Jack Haley — took top honors for overall team competition and best brief.

They competed with teams representing law schools throughout the U.S. and Canada, including Case Western Reserve and Capitol Universities in Ohio.

Haley and Victoroff also outclassed other aspiring student-lawyers to win first and second place, respectively,

for best advocate.

"CSU TEAMS IN the past have been every bit as good as we were, but luck was on our side," said Victoroff. "And maybe a little magic."

The son of Dr. and Mrs. Victor Victoroff of Cleveland Heights, he has won several awards in contests with other magicians. But he would swear before a jury that he had no tricks up his sleeve when he pulled off his latest big win in Toronto.

Although mind-reading is one of his specialties, he didn't practice it on the Moot Court panel there, he says. In fact, with coaching from the team's faculty advisors, Ann Aldrich and Jeff Olson, he played down the sleight-of-hand gestures and flamboyant theatrics in getting his act together for this judicious audience.

"I THOUGHT AFTER watching Perry Mason that you go into the courtroom and put on a show," he reflects on his early impression.

And with his professional experience and background as a theater major at Beloit College in Wisconsin, he could have done just that.

Instead, he learned that the judges want a slow, deliberate presentation.

Victoroff equated the restraint it took to being in a straight jacket.

BUT HIS GENIUS as a magician had its plus side.

"Reading a law case is like figuring out a puzzle," he explains. "When a magician studies a trick, it's the same sort of puzzlement, and he has to analyze how it works."

"Arguing in Moot Court is similar because the problems they give us are like a two-headed coin; they have no right or wrong answers. We learn to argue either side with the same convincing, sincere logic."

But he thinks performing for a group of 8-year-olds is far different from arguing a case in court.

"The kids are more skeptical than the judges, who really want to believe you because you're appealing to them with logic," he says. "You don't have to work quite the same sort of magic."

BUT IT WAS quite a trick to prepare for the Toronto competition, since the problem was based on international law, which Victoroff and his teammates, all second-year students, have not yet studied. They had little more than two weeks to re-

search it and write their brief.

"The difference was made up by our advisors," Victoroff maintains, particularly crediting Ms. Aldrich, whose specialty is international law.

The issue argued by all the competing students concerned the right of one nation to exploit offshore oil resources which threatened the environment of a neighboring country.

SINCE THEY COULD write the brief for only one side, the CSU team chose to strengthen their preparation by defending what they considered to be the weaker side, the environmentalist viewpoint. That, of course, paid off.

So did the practice rounds the team held before several prominent Greater Cleveland attorneys who volunteered their time to critique them.

"It was a very intimidating experience," Victoroff recalls. "We were just law students, and they were established attorneys playing devil's advocates. They were tougher than any judges in the actual competition."

WITH THE THRILL of his courtroom triumphs still fresh, Victoroff is instilling a new sort of magic into

the street law course he conducts for students at Cleveland's John F. Kennedy High School. It is one of several given by CSU law students at high schools throughout the county.

"The potential for future lawyers in these street law programs is tremendous," he says. "It puts law as a profession out in front of them and shows them it's within their reach."

The class also is personally fulfilling for him, since he is using the teaching certificate he earned with his undergraduate degree.

WHILE HE HASN'T performed as a magician since entering law school, Victoroff still keeps up with his tricks privately. And someday he hopes to entertain again. Some of this city's best magicians are lawyers, he claims.

"There's nothing that can really match the feeling of going into a children's ward of a hospital and performing for them," he says. "When you see children who may never walk again or are severely burned, and you can make them smile and laugh, then you know magic truly exists."



GREGORY VICTOROFF