



**BY JENNIFER HESHION**

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**MATTAPOISETT** — For magician Leland Faulkner, meeting magician John Calvert and the folk musical group “Peter, Paul and Mary” changed his life.

When Faulkner visited Center and Old Hammondtown Schools on January 19, he spoke of his epiphany after seeing his “hero,” Calvert, in 1969.

“I was 10, and I never forgot that performance,” Faulkner said. “I was 13 when I made the decision to follow [Calvert] and be an actor. I immediately began studying mime, theater and acting.”

Faulkner, who resides in Maine, was born in Afghanistan to Native American parents. His father worked overseas for the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Due to his father’s work obligations, Faulkner said he and his parents moved often. He attended schools in Iran and East Africa before moving to Missouri in 1969.

At 19, Faulkner was a student at the University of Missouri in Kansas City when he was offered to tour as a magician throughout schools in Iowa and Nebraska.

He left college and has been touring across the country and overseas ever since, minus a seven-year break while he received a bachelor’s degree in Film Studies from the Brooks Institute in California.

Faulkner recently returned from a tour in China where, at every show, he performed for nearly 3,000 people. He will head back overseas in March for a tour throughout Russia.

While Faulkner performs for audiences of all age ranges, he said his school performances remind him of the importance of arts education.

This realization, he said, came courtesy of “Puff the Magic Dragon.”

“I think I’ll always do schools, because I think it’s really valuable,” he said. “When I was in school in Africa, they never had any assembly program, until my school had a group come in and play some folk songs,” he said. “That group was Peter, Paul and Mary, and I was really moved that we were listening to these artists in school. I always remembered that. This makes appreciate my role in furthering the arts.”

Faulkner works with the non-profit group Young Audiences, a Massachusetts program that brings artists to schools across the state to promote the arts.

It was through this group that Mattapoissett Parent Teacher Organization Arts and Humanities Committee Chair Debra Nettles first contacted Faulkner about performing for the local students.

“I heard about his performances, so I started watching his videos on Youtube,” Nettles said. “I really enjoyed it. He had all the kids mesmerized.”

Faulkner performed for the students using mime, magic tricks and shadow puppets to tell stories set in the classroom, a Turkish bazaar and the gardens of Japan.

The young audiences, he said, can be his toughest critics.

“It’s the live reaction you get right here, right now that’s so great,” Faulkner said. “The reaction is especially great from young audiences because it’s honest. They tell you how they feel and—believe me—you know if they like it or not.”

So what did the critics have to say on Thursday?

Center School third grade student Izhiah Maldonado said he loved the show, especially Faulkner's magic trick to make paper butterflies fly about the stage.

"I have to say, that was the best part," Maldonado said.

Faulkner's shadow puppets were a favorite with Izhiah's fellow third grade classmates Meghan Spangler and Mia Costa.

"It was great how he could do so many different things with the shadows," Spangler said.

"I loved how he could use his hands to make a dog chase a rabbit," Costa said. "I couldn't believe how he could keep making them run."

"With the kids, they want to know how to do everything," Faulkner said. "I like to plant some seeds to encourage questions from the audiences. It's important to encourage them to use their ability to change the world."