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## **Forward**

Creativity is right in the heart of God. We read that "in the beginning God created..". Therefore, it is no surprise to know that God encourages and desires us to be creative in the expression of our Christian living and with the message of the Kingdom.

Truth2Tell is a creative ministry which is seeking to express Kingdom truth through many different media. The communication of Bible truth through drama, music, comedy, clowning and puppetry enables the audience to see, hear and understand truth which might otherwise be uncommunicated.

I recommend this teaching manual and resource to you and pray God's blessing on all that Geoff and his team seek to do for the Lord.

Rev. Roger Rowland

Elim Regional Youth Director and Leader of Elim National Youth Team

## **Acknowledgments**

Having been interested in puppets for many years it is impossible to give thanks by name to all who have influenced the contents of this booklet. I have produced this booklet from my own experience but reflected within it is the training I have received from 'Cleford Puppets' and 'One Way UK'. These two sources of training have had a great influence on my approach to puppet ministry. My first formal puppet training came from 'Cleford Puppets' and I soon found 'One Way UK' who's European Puppet Festival is one event I never miss. It was at one of these events that I met Vicky Gaskil, a professional puppeteer from America who helped me hone my ventriloquistic skills. I would like to thank these and all the other people and ministries who have influenced Truth2tell and this booklet.

I would also like to thank my wife, Diana, who has spent time reading through the garbled mess of extremely incomprehensible English, which this booklet would have been without her proof reading skills; Elim Christian Centre - Salisbury (my current church fellowship) who are providing a base for Truth2tell; Roger Rowland for the lone of his puppets and his ongoing encouragement; Downton Baptist Church who led me to Christ and my two children, Carl & Emma, who have suffered less attention as a result of this booklet.

Geoff Skeats - Truth2tell

## Why Puppets?

You have probably seen for yourself how puppets can communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ or Bible teaching in a simple yet effective and entertaining way. We live in an age of high technology entertainment and training systems, so why puppets? Puppets bring a different angle to ministry and training. The puppet is in itself inanimate. Everybody knows it, yet when the puppet is expressing hurt or sadness we find ourselves empathising with it.

Puppets break down our natural defence mechanisms as we suspend reality and enter a world where the puppets become real and alive in our imaginations. Even adults will enter the world of the puppets and give ear to their message. If you doubt this just look at the successful TV programmes like 'The Muppets' and 'Spitting Image'. The Muppets were first on the scene and were televised as a children's programme. However it was soon realised that as many adults watched the programme as children! The time was changed to later in the evening and the content was changed so it became a family orientated programme. After seeing how successful this was, Spitting Image was developed to focus exclusively at the adults. This was a satirical look at politics and current affairs amongst the famous. For several years these two programs held prime time viewing for their target audiences. It is interesting that these two programmes regularly broke the basic rules of puppet manipulation and yet were extremely popular programmes. The puppeteering techniques were often quite poor yet their appeal was not affected.

## This Guide

This guide is intended as a help to get you started in puppet ministry. It is not a complete course in puppetry. Although this guide is mostly focused on those using moving mouth puppets in a theatre setting, information has also been included relevant to those not using moving mouth puppets or those not using a puppet theatre. Through this guide we intend to provide you with the information you need to begin puppet ministry. You will also learn the 'Golden rules' of Puppet Ministry which are vital to any successful puppet ministry and the '10 Commandments' of puppet manipulation. These '10 Commandment's will help you to manipulate a puppet so that it looks alive. If your puppet is not alive, no one will listen to it, especially children. When your puppet is alive everyone will take notice - even the teenager who is trying not to appear to do so! Truth2tell hope you find this guide useful and go on to enjoy a successful ministry using puppets.

## **Spend time with God**

If you don't have a close relationship with Jesus then there is no point in trying to minister. Spend time in God's word, prayer and fellowship with other Christians. Unless we are in a right relationship with God and his people then we have nothing of value to share with others. Puppets are a vehicle for communicating the love of God. If we are not in that love ourselves it will not be shared. Your ministry will only be as effective as your capacity to allow God's love flow through you. If you are working with a team it is vital that you spend time praying together and for each other and that you spend a little time each practice session studying God's word. **Remember GIGO - Garbage In Garbage Out!**

## **No Violence**

You may have seen Emu on TV or Punch & Judy at the seaside. These are classic examples of bad puppetry. Puppets should be approachable and safe. When they are seen to be violent, children often get scared. This can put them off for life. I have several friends who will still not go near puppets because of a bad experience as a child. If you are hoping to share the love of God through puppets then violence will at best distract and at worst scare. It is always best avoided. Violence can safely be talked about but never enact it with the puppets. While the world can get away with bad mouthed and violent puppetry, we as Christians are required to set the example. Our puppets, like us, are required to show the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Yes, they can make mistakes but they will always respond to Jesus in the end (except Devil puppets of course).

## **Preparation**

A preacher once told me that to preach a really anointed word you had to study as if there were no Holy Spirit and rely on the Holy Spirit as if you hadn't planned. Puppeteering is no different. If it can go wrong it will. Plan every skit and performance to the minutest detail. List all equipment and sound effects and create check lists for each skit and one master for the whole performance. Make sure all relevant props, puppets, scripts, microphones, and so on, are in the specified place at the specified time. Make sure every puppeteer knows where they should be at every moment. Leave absolutely nothing to chance and **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!**

## **Always Aim for Perfection**

No matter how good you or your team are there will always be room for improvement. Always aim for perfection but also remember to praise a good performance. A rule of thumb is that if the team do less well than usual then gentle but realistic encouragement is needed. The team will know when they were not up to scratch so you yelling at them will not help. If, on the other hand, the team do better than usual **PRAISE THEM TO THEIR FACES!** Let them know you think their performance was better than average. This is especially important for solo puppeteers. Don't be hard on yourself when it goes wrong! Just learn from your mistakes and keep on improving.

# The 10 Commandments of Puppet Manipulation

## 1. Keep Your Puppet Alive

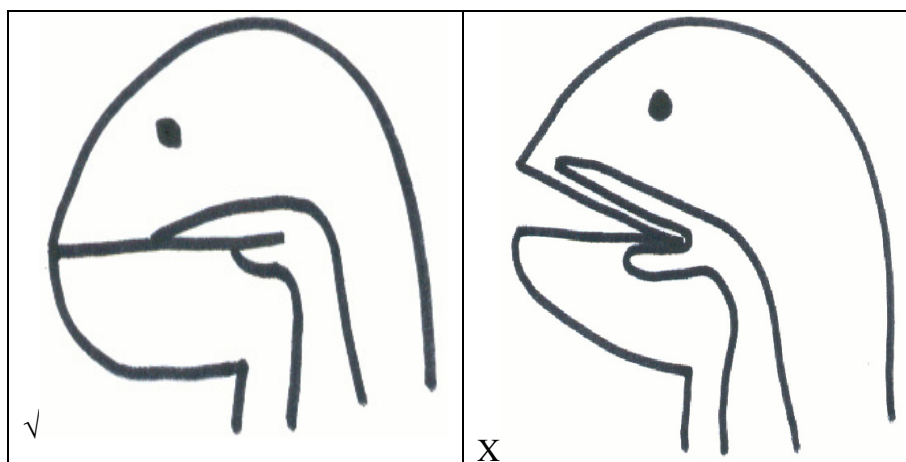
**THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF PUPPETRY!** If the puppet does not appear to be alive then the illusion is broken and everyone loses. A puppet that is not moving is a dead puppet and a dead puppet is seen at best to be just a toy and at worst a meaningless bit of rag on a hand. The puppet should be seen to be alive at all times, sometimes looking around, sometimes slight movements to give the feel of breathing, but always doing something even when another puppet is the main focus of attention.

## 2. Maintain Eye Contact

Make sure the puppet is maintaining eye contact with the audience. If it has to look at another puppet then it's head should turn to a 45° angle to be half way between the other puppet and the audience. Real stage performers do this so make sure the puppets do the same. It is important not to have a side profile of a face toward the audience, an angled face emphasises the 3D aspect of the puppets face and has more impact when viewed by the audience than a side profile. In turn the full frontal face has even more impact.

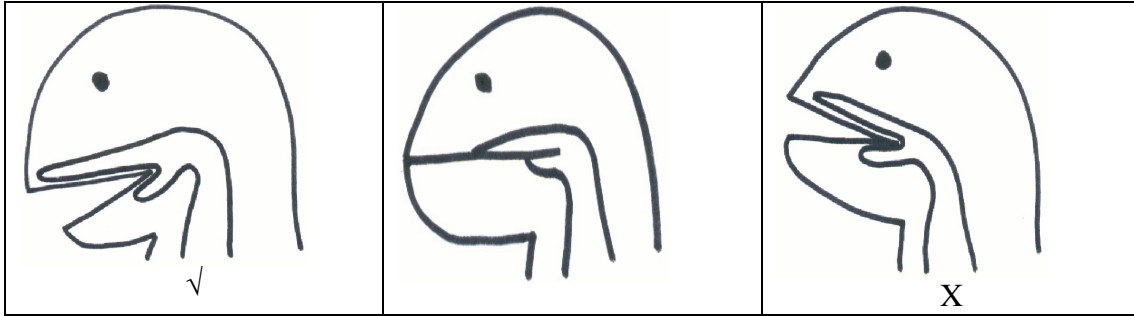
## 3. Keep the Head Low

Make sure the puppet does not appear to be looking at the sky unless he is referring to something above or is displaying boredom by looking all around the room. Keeping the head low is also part of keeping eye contact. The audience should always be lower than the stage, therefore the puppet's head should always be angled slightly down. Not fully down unless showing depression or sadness etc. and not horizontal unless showing snootiness.



#### 4. Do Not Flip the Lid

Flipping the lid is when the puppets head rises and falls during speech. Kermit the frog from the Muppets was particularly bad at flipping the lid. When a puppet is talking the thumb which should be in the lower jaw of the puppet should drop. DO NOT RAISE THE FINGERS! This will raise the head and cause lid flipping. When people speak the head does not go up and down but the jaw does. It should be the same for the puppets. It will be uncomfortable at first but you will get used to it.



#### 5. Use the Stairs

When a puppet comes on stage in a puppet theatre it should appear to use three steps and when it exits it should appear to use three steps. Puppets should never just appear (unless it is a magical appearance using a distracting flash with sound effect) but they should be seen to enter realistically. By using the steps people have a reason for their upward appearance. If puppets disappear and reappear without a mechanism, the illusion of life is broken, along with audience attention.

#### 6. Avoid the Quicksand

When on stage the puppet should be clearly seen by the audience. This means that the puppet should be at the correct height. The correct height for any puppet is just a little lower than the bottom of the puppets body. The chest of the puppet should be clearly seen. Having said that there is puppet quicksand behind each stage which must be avoided. The quicksand I am referring to is the puppeteers arm! When the arm gets tired the puppet gradually sinks until all you can see is a head because the puppeteers hand is resting on the puppet theatre. Keeping your arm up for any length of time is painful and there is an exercise which can help. Pick up a standard size bible and hold it between your thumb and fingers at the base of the bible, Lift it above your head with your arm fully extended and then move your wrist so that it is in the same position as if you had a puppet on your hand. Hold it there as long as possible up to 20 minutes. If you keep this exercise going you will have no trouble keeping a puppet from falling into the quicksand.

## **7. Maintain Good Lip Synchronization**

If you watch people speak you will notice that the mouth opens with every syllable. When people start off the natural inclination is to close the mouth with each syllable (this is called biting the words). Time must be taken to ensure that the puppeteer learns good lip synchronisation skills. This will mean regular practice in front of a mirror and workshop sessions if you are part of a group.

## **8. Maintain Puppet Characters**

When performing with puppets you will soon learn that the children will remember the characters of your puppets. The longest amount of time I can personally vouch for is about 30 years! I can still remember Lord Charles, Emu, Basil Brush, Sooty, Sweep, Sue, Bill & Ben, and many more including all the puppets from Thunderbirds etc! I can still remember their personalities and catch phrases. You will find the children will do the same. It is hard when setting out with a couple of puppets to create and maintain puppet identities, but it is imperative that you do. The children will spot the slightest change in a puppets character even if it is your second visit and it has been two years since you last came!

## **9. Maintain a good body position**

Your body is important to puppet ministry. If you injure yourself through bad positioning then you will no longer be able to perform. Keep your body as upright as possible, avoid crouching and twisting your neck when using a puppet theatre. do not use chairs as this will limit movement and take up too much room. When possible kneel upright from the knees up or stand upright. The puppeteer should never bend the elbow except when entering and exiting to create the stairs effect. Before each performance do some warm-up stretches and if time do some between skits. This will loosen the muscles making them more pliable which reduces muscle stress and decreases the likelihood of muscular injury.

## **10. Enjoy It**

If you are not having a great time, **it will affect the audience.** You must take control of your emotions and enjoy what you are doing. Like any good performer, you will have to put aside any negative feelings from real life and enter fully into the world of the puppets. You are creating a fantasy world in order to communicate on the children's level. You are entering their territory so keep your emotions up-beat and enjoy performing. There really is no point in puppetry unless you enjoy it yourself.

## **Using Puppets Without a Theatre**

You will find that rules 1, 2, 3, (if puppet has moving mouth 4 &7), 8 9 & 10 will apply equally well when you do not use a puppet theatre. However rule 5 is replaced with a different rule.

### **Rule 5 Make Entrances and Exits Natural**

With puppetry everything you do needs to have a reason. This is especially true for entrances and exits. Your puppet must be introduced in a natural and flowing manner. If you just clumsily reach into a bag and stuff the puppet on in front of the audience, don't expect them to believe it is alive. You must treat the puppet at all times as a living being. If it is a small furry animal then it needs to appear to the audience that you are picking it up carefully and cradling it. If it is a ventriloquist doll then you must be careful to not let your audience see you actually pick it up.

The ventriloquist doll needs to either be carried on with you or you should have a suitable case or solid platform so that you can hide the puppet and your picking it up from the audience. This requires extra planning to make sure the introduction and picking up of the ventriloquist doll is smooth and realistic. Care must also be taken to keep the entrance of the puppet in line with it's character. It is no use having the puppet afraid to go on stage if he is going to be flamboyant when he is performing.

### **Other Useful Pointers**

When performing without a theatre you too are performing. Your character will be interacting with the puppet. This means that your gestures words and actions will become part of the skit. It doesn't matter if your puppet has a voice or not, there will be communication between you and the puppet with the audience in on the conversation. It is, after all, for their benefit. There is a temptation to focus so much on what the puppet is doing that you forget to watch what you are doing. This can lead to disaster. You need to choreograph your own movements as well as the puppets.

When the puppet is speaking pay attention to the puppet. It is not impotent whether you are venting or it is whispering in your ear, you must focus the audiences attention on the puppet at all times even when you are talking. Believe me no-one want's to see you, it is the puppet who is the important one. This brings me to my final pointer.

Make sure that the puppet is the one to deliver the main message of the skit. Because the audience will not pay much attention to what you say. As I said above they are only interested in what the puppet is saying. I don't know why this is but it is the experience of every puppeteer I have ever spoken to on this subject.

## **Using Non-moving Mouth puppets**

Just because your puppets mouth does not move does not exclude your puppet from speaking. An excellent example of non-moving mouth puppetry can be found in the Sooty show. Here we have an example which shows three methods of non-moving mouth puppet communication. This show has been going on for many years. It has been televised twice and is still very popular with children. It has even survived being passed down from father to son without losing either its appeal or style. The show has many different elements to it and if you are (or intend) using this style of puppet, getting hold of some Sooty show videos will provide you with some excellent ideas, If you study them, you will be learning from an excellent example of how to use non-moving mouth puppets effectively.

### **Non-verbal Speaking**

First we have Sooty himself. Sooty always whispers into the puppeteers ear. Never do we hear the voice of Sooty. This is the most common form of puppeteering with non-moving mouth puppets. Generally the puppet communicates by whispering, but with careful gestures your puppet will not need to whisper to communicate. Sooty often used head nodding to communicate along with head positioning. He would look to the audience in certain situations which communicated different things according to the situation. A shaking puppet can communicate coldness or fear, a shy puppet will hide its face from the audience. If your puppet is non-verbal then its actions will often be more important than what you repeat when it whispers.

### **Unintelligible or Animal Noises**

Sweep on the other hand always squeaked when communicating. Only the puppeteer and other puppets could understand Sweep. The only difference between this sort of puppet and non-verbal puppets is that it often makes a little more use of speech and can show emotion through the rapidness and loudness of its noise. If your puppet has a squeaker, squeezing hard on it will produce a louder noise and gently squeezing on it will reduce the noise. If you squeeze rapidly it will show anger or excitement and if you squeeze slowly it can show sadness or gentleness.

### **Human Voice**

Finally we have Sue (Sooty's Girlfriend). She always spoke clearly with a woman's voice. When using non-moving mouth puppets don't be limited by prejudice. As she spoke, her head moved very slightly with every syllable. She did not nod her head repeatedly but her head often moved slightly forward or up in the direction of the person she was speaking to. It is important to make sure that when talking, the puppet does not look like a nodding dog, but that it looks like natural head movement when talking. This will require you to watch people when they are talking and to get the puppet's movements mimicking that. This skill will require careful observation and lots of practice.

## **Sound Effects**

Sound effects can enhance any performance. They bring a sense of professionalism and quality to a performance when done well. The emphasis here is on the done well! A badly put together sound effect can bring disaster. Sound effects should be clear, have a purpose and be appropriate. They should always enhance the performance and not distract from the message. The purpose of sound effects is to highlight the action.

Theme tunes can give a sense of continuity between skits eg: the 'George of the Jungle' theme tells the audience that a certain puppet will be performing with some of his friends. We can put together several different skits but when the 'George of the Jungle' Skit starts they know what formula to expect. Likewise 'The Monkeys' and 'The Grannies' have their own theme tunes and expectations.

## **Props. & Scenery**

A good scene or prop. will support the story and not attract too much attention to itself. The most important aspect in puppetry is that unlike a stage performance where elaborate sets are created for each scene, a puppet scene uses as few props and as little scenery as is possible for a good presentation. This is because the average skit lasts for between 2 and 5 minutes. If you go to town on the scenery and props then changeover time is increased. You can't make children wait 10 minutes between 3 minute skits!

Puppet props need careful construction so that the puppet can easily use them and if needed pick them up. They should be light in weight and it should be clearly visible what it represents. It is very distracting trying to work out what a prop is during any performance. When the skit lasts only a few minutes your audience can miss the whole skit trying to work out what one object is. So take care when designing your props.

## **Lighting Effects**

Like every other aspect of puppetry, lighting should enhance the performance. It should be used carefully to create mood and atmosphere. The majority of skits can be adequately performed under the house lights so investment in lighting should be the last investment you should consider. Unless of course you are intending to use UV lighting or 'Blacklight' as it is called in the puppeteering world. Special care must be taken with this form of puppetry as UV lights have a tendency to explode when they fail. Make sure the UV bulbs are in a contained environment such as a clear cover surrounding the UV bulb.

# **remember K.I.S. - Keep It Simple!**

## **Making a Puppet Theatre**

You can purchase fully adjustable puppet theatres, but you will soon find that they are very expensive items. With some 40mm diameter drainage pipe and junctions and cloth you can make a simple or complex frame work for a fraction of the cost. You can also start with a simple one level stage and then add a second or perhaps a third tier as your team grows and your skits get more complicated.

My own stage has been constructed so that I can do solo stage puppetry using a half width and depth stage with (or without) backdrop or I can have anything up to a three stage full width theatre. The entire stage cost under £80. This is less than the £100+ cost of purchasing a ready made single stage without cloth or backdrop frame! For my piping I used the more expensive black drainage pipe as I was using plain black cloth (The cloth was not the cheapest I could find) and I was worried the pipe would show. As I later found, the pipes are covered by the cloth so there is no reason not to use the cheaper white pipe, especially if you want your stage to be a different colour than black. By using cheaper materials there is no reason your stage should cost as much as £50. However I would recommend that you do not cut back on the quality of the cloth. It needs to be thick enough to block light and be durable.

This guide will lay out a 2 stage pattern for a puppet theatre. I am giving this design as the top stage is also a backdrop for single stage use. I have looked at single stage patterns without a backdrop and find they do not look good. Although I have the capacity for three stages, I have not used it yet and can only think of one puppet skit which would use it. I have not written the skit, because I have not got enough puppeteers yet. However when I do produce this skit it will have been worth the extra money and time.

## **Equipment**

For the stage you will need

Tape Measure	Saw	File (to smooth cut edges)
8 x L junctions,	6 x T junctions	9 x Full length pipes

You will need to use 40mm diameter plastic pipes. Anything smaller will be too flimsy and anything larger will be too large. Do not use metal pipes as they are more prone to damage and are heavier. You will probably need to move your theatre so weight is important.

Note You will cut two pipes in half for the depth (although you may wish to reduce the depth) and you will need to adjust the length of pipe for the vertical sections because of the junctions. Small sections of pipe will be needed to join the junctions to each other. Some people glue the vertical sections together, but I do not as I often need to swap pipes for different stage setups.

If you are only wanting to make a stage for solo puppetry then make it half width front and half depth with the backdrop slightly wider about 10 - 12 inches eg: cut one pipe into quarters for the depth and cut one pipe into half for the front and using the half as a measure cut two full lengths down to 10 inches longer than half. By making the rear slightly wider it makes the stage look better and gives more room for scenery and movement within the theatre.

## Preparation of Pipes

First put aside four full length pipes and six half length pipes. These will be your horizontal pipes which give your stage its width and depth with 2 verticals for the back of the stage. Take one of the Half length pipes and place an L junction on each end (1). This will be your template for measuring the length of pipe needed for the front and lower rear vertical sections.

Lay the template pipe on the ground and place a T junction parallel with the pipe and inside the L junctions at each end leaving no gap between the two sets of junctions (2). Measure the distance between the two sets of Junctions making sure that you measure the distance between the two nearest junctions of the different sets. **Make sure that you remember that the pipe goes into the junction so you need to measure from where the pipe will start and not the end of the junction.**

Cut 2 pieces of pipe at the measured length (we will call them front verticals. You will need to cut them from the remaining 2 full lengths of pipe (one from each full length). Remove one of the T junctions and measure again (3). Cut another two at the longer length (these are the back verticals). Use the remainder to cut 6 short bits of pipe. These will be used to join the junctions to each other so must be long enough to make a strong join but short enough not to part the two junctions. You now have the building material ready to construct the frame.

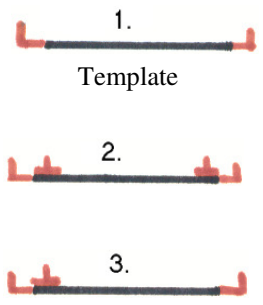
## Construction

Start by making a second half pipe with two L junctions (1) (we will call these templates). Take the front verticals and place a T junction on each end (4). Then take the two T junctions, join them together and put them on the rear verticals (5). Place each of the rear verticals in the L junction of each of the templates with the T junctions away from the L junction and then join the Front Verticals to the other end of the templates (6). Add a half length to make each structure into a squareish shape. The pipe will fit between the front T junction and the top of the two rear T junctions (7). Join an L junction to each of the front verticals (8).

Place the remaining half lengths on the rear verticals and then place the remaining two L junctions on top (9). You should now be able to join the two structures together using the full lengths of pipe to complete the structure (10).

When you make the four cloths make sure that the pipes can be threaded through the top of each cloth. This will make stage construction easier. You will need to make two sides, a back and a front. The rear cloth looks best if you make it one and a half times the width of the stage which will create a curtain effect which looks good and doesn't prevent its use a higher level stage. You will only need to have this cloth drop to the bottom rear horizontal pipe. This enables access to the front stage without disturbing the back cloth.

Care must be taken when choosing a colour. If there is any chance that you will be using Blacklight (UV light) Puppetry then you will need a very dark colour or black. If you are sure that you won't, then any colour will be fine, but remember some colours show the dirt and you will be doing the cleaning!



Front Vertical



Rear Vertical

