



Anthony Darkstone Brook In Conversation With Chuck Lehr

I am honored to call Chuck Lehr my friend. We've known each other a goodly while. Every-time, I am in Texas, we get together and have ice-cream. What can I say? Chuck loves ice-cream. Thanks to him, he has been instrumental in two major Magical highlights in my life. He is a warm & generous man with a smile that makes you feel you've been hugged. He has a glorious sense of mischief and is lots of fun to be with.

Someone once aptly remarked, "Dying is easy but comedy is hard ". Chuck's sense of humor is unique and his timing is impeccable. He makes his comedy look easy. Apart from being highly skilled in various aspects of Magic, he has that rare talent to be able to expertly "hide" that skill within his special brand of comedy. This combination of magical & comedic talent has provided him with a lucrative career as a Professional Entertainer. He also possesses the rare skill of making everyone he meets feel special.

ADB: Welcome Chuck. Thanks for conversing. You have lots of very funny lines but my personal favorite is the one about your age. How does that go?

CL: Howdy Tony. Great to chat with you. Ah! Ha! the line about my age!!! I'm 37 years old but I've been in Magic for 38 years. Ok, the first part is fiction. I'm really 73 but the second part is right, I've been doing Magic since I was 35.

ADB: You are now in Mesquite , near Dallas, Texas and have been there for many years. But, it's not your home town.....

CL: Well, it sure feels like itbut I moved there in 1976, but let me begin at the beginning. I always like doing that. It confuses people if you begin at the ending !!! I was born in Rutland, Vermont, October 14, 1936 - but I don't remember that. What is vivid in my mind is – near 4 years old - hiding behind a chair in the living room playing with matches with my brother Pete. Mom and Dad were baking in the kitchen. POOF. My first magic act. - the curtains went up in flame. Fortunately, Mom and Dad were there immediately to extinguish the fire.

On to Johnstown, New York near the age of five, where my six brothers and sisters guaranteed that I would have an exciting childhood, including smoking cigarettes, crying when the police wouldn't take me with them when they escorted my brothers to the city jail (out too late at the playground), and things like that. Most of my young life was spent in Johnstown, where I attended Knox Jr. High School and graduated from Johnstown High School in 1954. I AM proud that I was successful in school and even shared the "Physics" prize at graduation with the smartest kid in school.

Throughout high school, I was lucky to spend my early mornings slicing and wrapping bread at the Fonda Bakery (I studied between loaves) ...and so, I'm not overtly fond of making sandwiches !!!!and I spent my evenings, and Saturdays proudly employed in the Johnstown office of our local newspaper, the "Leader Herald".

ADB: In 1955, you went to work for Uncle Sam and that became a major career move

CL: Yes Tony, in October of 1955, I was fortunate to spend three months basking on the shores of Seneca Lake – in frigid upstate New York; it was in a barracks, and I was miserable in basic training. But, those were the only days I ever was miserable in the Air Force. Following basic training, I experienced the very best military career anyone could ever hope for. WOW - MacDill AFB at Tampa, Florida – then Goose Bay, Laborador – then Pease AFB, New Hampshire.

ADB: Whilst on leave, in 1959, you experienced a life –changing event , I mean quite literally ...you even remarked that you found Heaven ...!!!!

CL: Yes Tony, it literally did change my life completely. The very very best thing that ever happened in my entire life! While on leave in Johnstown, I met the most beautiful young lady in the world. Almost immediately, I asked her to marry me – She said YES!. We got married in June of 1959. (If you count without running out of fingers, you can see we just recently celebrated our 50th anniversary.) Between the bumps and potholes of young married life, I had found HEAVEN!

ADB:New Hampshire also provided you with a novel experience ... fatherhood ...

CL: Yes that was very scary but it also made me feel very proud. We lived in Maine, on the border of New Hampshire. There, we were joined by a tiny “Maine-iac” named Michael Jeffrey. Together, we all continued a military life – on to Washington, D.C. There, we were joined by Mitchell Alan (not so scary this time). Mitch was very cooperative. We were now a complete family. I step out of the chronology here to share that both Mike and Mitch are incredible young men. Both brought excitement and pleasure to our lives. Mere words cannot show how proud I am (and was) to be the father of such genuine sons – sons who honored Joannie and I with a wonderful (and cosmopolitan) family.

ADB: Tell us a bit more about your Military career. I believe at one time you were part of a very hush-hush group.....

CL: Almost the entire remainder of my military career was spend in that one outfit – Air Force Technical Applications Center (AFTAC), also known as the 1035th USAF Field Activities Group. We spend several years in Washington – then several years in Honolulu – next back to Washington – and finally back to Honolulu again – all while assigned to AFTAC. This was a classified organization at the time, which prohibited us from ANY travel anywhere near a war zone. Short staff visits to Japan, and Korea were as close as I ever got to Southeast Asia. I left AFTAC as a SMSgt (E8) in 1975 and spent my final AF tour at Minot, N.Dakota, as Director of Administrative Services of the 5th Bomb Wing.

ADB: After that, is when you truly began to devote yourself to beginning a professional career as a Performer. But Magic didn't begin then did it ?

CL: No, Tony, it began in the Military and I am proud to say I had a nice jump-start with the help of two great magicians – Jimmy Kane and Jimmy Yoshida. I was blessed with a unique and interesting Air Force career, which landed me in Hawaii for the better part of ten years. Well, to back-track a bit and fast -forward a bit too..... After I retired from the Military , Joannie and I aimed for Texas and ended up living in Mesquite. I spent the next 20 years as the Administrative Assistant in the Safety Engineering Department at Employers Insurance of Texas. I retired from there – only after they were forced out of business by the State (something about – not enough money in reserves). A-HA! Despite some rants from Joannie, I was able to finally be a full-time professional magician. But – I digress. Let's now go back to the start of all of this magic stuff.

My magic life began in Paradise, (Hawaii) and for the next many years, I spent a large part of it doing everything from trade shows for Rolls Royce to birthday parties for soooo many kids – and everything in between.

Under the watchful eyes of Hawaiian magicians Jimmy Kane and Jimmy Yoshida, Joannie and I (POSEY and FLOWER KLOWNS) got the break of a lifetime with a two-year stint at the Holiday Inns at Waikiki Beach and Honolulu International Airport. Jimmy Kane provided the technical advice. We spent many an evening in the back booth of various coffee shops learning the basics from Fu-Ling-Yu. Jimmy Yoshida provided the venue. We worked with him at both Holiday Inns entertaining table-to-table. We spent our last military year at Minot, North Dakota where we continued entertaining weekly at the Holiday Inn there. Since settling in Dallas in 1975, I continued to provide family-rated entertainment to audiences across the USA; including Boston, Tampa, Atlanta, Kentucky, Orlando, Las Vegas, and across Texas and its neighboring states.

Of course, our magic income was supplemented by a grateful government and with another career as an administrator in the insurance field. My employer made good use of my magic, using me at various tradeshows in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas; and teaching in seminars for the company.

ADB: During the years that followed, you tried pretty much everything magically and did it all. However, slowly, but surely, a defining character emerged and that is the one you still use today. Share some of those times with us please

CL: Over the next several years, I had all but abandoned the “painted face” and adopted costumes such as a fancy tux, western gambler, ancient wizard, Uncle Sam, or even a Chinese magician. But, my very favorite performance attire (almost my trademark) was a zany slick street magician, complete with pop-up tie and flying flower. Some FUN. I have done a variety of magic; comedy, sophisticated, trade show, magic with a message, hospitality rooms, close-up, stage, libraries, and schools; and I always worked for the SMILE. Of course, it was all purely G-rated.

Over the years, I left them LAUGHING and APPLAUDING at places like Southfork Ranch, Six Flags over Texas, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Rolls-Royce of Canada, and Local & NBC National TV. "Never failed to win a smile" said the Waikiki Holiday Inn. Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge was known to say, "He even made ME laugh".

I was a "full-timed pro" from March 1994. The year 2001 (a slow year), I performed nearly 300 shows. That should give you an idea of how busy I was. I stayed busy with magic full-time, and tried to involve myself in the Society of American Magicians (S.A.M.) and Dallas Magic Club activities. I was voted a "Life Member" of the Dallas Magic Club. How does magic fit into my life – better stated – how does my life fit into magic? The best answer is “By Appointment”. We found ourselves making appointments and clearing calendar dates just to enjoy an evening with our grown children.

ADB: How did you get to grips with the development and creation of your unique act?

CL: Performing as Posey Clown for many years with Joannie gave me experience and “guts” to be in front of a group. It helped me polish my magic. Pretty soon I found that I could do the magic - without the face paint. My life suddenly became easier. I could now do more shows. Next, I learned that with just a bit of added sophistication, I could do the same magic for adults. For the most part, they were all just big kids anyways.

ADB: I hear that you are not living at a hectic pace so much

CL: Yes.. I am slowing down. I began to “coast” in 2007 (A typical weekend then was limited to three shows on Saturday, two on Sunday, and an occasional day off during the week). As much as I loved magic, I knew it was important to “smell the roses”, so a major part of my schedule continued to be birthday parties (my favorite). Further, I love sleeping in my own bed, so I tried to stay closer to home. What kept me busy working was a basic club-type show that could expand or contract to fit the situation. Normally, 40 minutes of funny magic got me through a banquet, or a shortened version would suffice for a business seminar-meeting break. I also spent a lot of time performing strolling magic – which I dearly loved. Did I do restaurants? Yes –

but I tried to stay away from the extended contracts. I preferred the excitement of different venues.

ADB: I know what you mean. It's an added adrenalin rush, the excitement of different venues. However, we all have to start somewhere, so do you have some thoughts you'd like to share with those starting out

CL: Well...one major observation of caution – keep your day-job. You need a fall-back position because it does not happen overnight. It takes time to build your reputation and client base. For me, once it got rolling, my magic (business) became a 16-hour a day job. Always “on”, always checking phone messages, always getting ready for the show. There was a time when I was doing as many shows as I could fit in a day.

Another thought is to keep an open mind to learning the business . it is not enough to have the ability to do tricks or make people laugh, you have to pay the bills and so learn how to make a living. Maybe I am not the best example of a “career” magician. A real “full-time” magician would have to work a lot harder than I have. I had military and civilian retirement benefits to fall back on. Without those, I certainly would be a nervous wreck, and still beating the bushes for work.

I was fortunate that I was in a position to pick and choose my gigs. Another blessing for any “full-time pro” is an understanding mate who is involved in the lifestyle.

ADB: Over the years you have been served in several Magic Organizations and picked up a few Awards too.....

CL: My peers in the entertainment field have seen fit to award me First Place in several magic competitions: Close-up Magician at the Midwest Magic Jubilee and the Texas Association of Magicians Convention for two separate years, and Comedy Stage Magic at the Texas Association of Magicians Convention. I am a Past President of the Texas Association of Magicians (over 1,000 members nationwide and a few International ones also); twice Past President Dallas Magic Clubs; Past Regional Vice President for the Gulf States and Volunteer Coordinator in The Society of American Magicians for several years; and finally, National Secretary for the S.A.M. from July 2006 to July 2008.

ADB: In Conversation with Dal Sanders, who is currently the RVP for The S.A.M in Texas, we talked about the Ike & Gustav tragedies in Houston and other parts of Texas. Share with us some of your involvement & experiences as The S.A.M National Secretary

CL: You cannot imagine how proud I was to carry the moniker of National Secretary. WOW, my own calling cards! While I am not a “political” person, I am organized, so I loved the details and the pressure of the job. Every report, every task was a personal challenge to me. And the friends – what a great group of people. It was so neat to work with people of such high caliber. I was always amazed to watch the thought processes during Board meetings. I always felt I was in tall cotton at these meetings. I actually had foreign dignitaries seeking me out for help with visas, etc. What a privilege.

ADB: In July 2007, The Society of American Magicians held its Convention in Dallas, Texas and I produced and hosted two shows and got to spend some quality time with lots of my Dallas Magic friends as well. The Convention was outstanding in many ways, firstly, R.G Smith put together an outstanding bill of International Performers and secondly , some of the parties were just so much fun . What a lot of people don't know was that you and a few others also worked tirelessly in the background to make this one of the most interesting conventions. At these Conventions , a lot of The S.A.M “business” is conducted as well, such as the Caucus meeting , Council meeting and voting on various issues. Getting all that happened written down, preparing The Blue Book, etc., etc.,. In short, quite a bit of work for The National Secretary. Tell us a little of the behind the scenes work that went into all of that ...

CL: Joannie and I tried for years to entice the S.A.M. to hold a convention here in Dallas. It finally happened. The Dallas S.A.M. convention was certainly a highlight for both of us. The problem was that we got to see very little of it. One entire afternoon trying to resolve some lighting problems for a contestant, a “bank run” to provide our cash to pay certain performers, racing between activities to insure everything was in place and working. What really made it all

special was when, at the convention banquet, Convention Executive Mike Douglass publicly acknowledged Joannie and I as honorary convention committee members. What a thrill!

ADB: And a well-deserved acknowledgement it was too! I was one of several people in that room who happily joined in the enthusiastic applause and hearty cheering for you both. Just wonderful to see and share in so much appreciation. As you know, I was back in your neck of the woods once again in August 2008. This time at the Texas Association of Magicians Convention in Fort Worth. I was invited to Produce & Host a TV style Talk show honoring Walter “Zaney” Blaney. Great guests on the show, including a call from David Copperfield . You were also a guest on the show and whilst on stage surprised me with a Presidential citation. That was fun ...let’s share that wonderful moment ...

CL: Yes Tony is was fun. If you recall, I had told you that I was asked by outgoing 2007/2008 S.A.M. President Maria Ibanez to present a Citation to Walter but we also secretly arranged to present one to you too and we thought it might be fun to actually do it on stage during the Talk Show; if you recall, I announced it as a Typographical error that it had your name on it instead of Walter’s. I know you love fun & mischief as much as I do!!!!

You should have seen the look on your face. But, always the professional, you recovered and went on to provide us with a wonderful show that ended with Walter levitating Frances Willard.

ADB: Yes Chuck that was truly exciting and we have it all on tape too! Mid 2008 was also a turning point for you. You decided to change gear

CL: Well.. as you know , even though I was “coasting” I was still working at a fast pace and Joannie had not been too well and so although it was quite exciting,.... for me, the writing was on the wall, and we had to change priorities, so my “coasting” became almost “retirement”. No more travelling, no evening shows - just simple and occasional daytime shows. That was so I could be available to spend more time at home with Joannie .

ADB: I know you still perform but you must often think back to all the many events and adventures in your performing life; but thinking back is there one thing , big or small that stuck in your mind ?

CL: Well, as you say, there are so many stories and I could write a book. Maybe I should.....but thinking back over my magic career, a defining moment comes to mind. During my first year learning the nuances of magic, I was advised by my mentor, Jimmy Kane, that I probably could not handle half dollars – that I should try to do my coin routines with quarters. I WAS DEVASTATED. But this gave me the impetus to try even harder. I would show him! I practiced even more, so I could become proficient with half-dollar coin routines. This led me to back-palming, which I could NOT master. Getting that coin hidden resulted in an arthritic look, further complicated by the holes between my skinny fingers. My solution was a Back-Clip between the index and middle fingers. This, I would ultimately practice for TWO years before actually using it in public. I TOLD you I was dedicated.

ADB: Yes indeed you are. I can personally vouch for that. During one of our conversations, we spoke about some of the offices you held and accolades you received. Is there one that you value the most?

CL: Yes. It is what I believe might be the most telling of my magic life. In December, 2008, my friends at the Dallas Magic Clubs saw fit to designate ME as the official “Dean – of the Dallas Magic Clubs”. This action may have been due to my advanced age, or an effort to make me stop performing at each and every meeting, but I like to think that it was because “magic” has brought me one of the greatest of treasures – “friendship”.

ADB: I, and most certainly, all your many friends in the US and around the world would wholeheartedly concur that it is a richly deserved accolade. Next time, I am in Dallas we shall definitely go celebrate over hamburgers & ice-cream. This time I’ll buy!!

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