



### **Anthony Darkstone Brook in Conversation with Dal Sanders**

Dal Sanders is one of the leading Magicians in Texas. Based in Dallas, he has been a Professional Magician for some 30 years and has literally performed in all 50 States. He is currently a RVP for The Society of American Magicians and it would not surprise me in the least if he will be its President some day. I am delighted to have met him several years ago and I look forward to seeing him whenever I am in Texas. In private life, he is a quiet, gentle and friendly man with a great sense of humor and an infectious smile. In performance, he is a formidable Entertainer & Lecturer. At his lecture in Houston 2008, several top names attended. I was fortunate to be there at the time. His lecture content, pace of delivery and showmanship were outstanding. After his lecture, we hung out with some other mutual friends. The after-meal conversation turned to our favorite topic, the Performance & Presentation of Magic. Dal knows about StageCraft and how to create meaningful Stage Magic. An accomplished Performer in all aspects of Magic he is a much sought after Corporate Entertainer and Producer.

<http://www.stagemagic.com/>



**ADB:** Hello Dal. Thanks for taking time to chat a while. Let's begin by me asking you about running for Second Vice-President of The S.A.M. How did that get started?

**DS:** Hi Tony. Thanks for inviting me as a Guest. Well... my interest in running for National Office for the S.A.M started in 1993 when my friend Dan Rodriguez was the National President of the Society. Way back then Dan started talking to me about stepping up and getting involved in leadership on a national level. Over the years, there have been several other National Officers and PNPs who would encourage me to run for office. In 2005, I saw what the Society of American Magicians did to help out various entertainers who were victims of Hurricane Katrina. I realized how important an organization the S.A.M. can be. After that, I started researching the many programs that are part of the Society and I realized that this is more than "just a magic club". This is an organization that recognizes those pivotal moments in time and has the courage and the resources to respond to them. When you combine that commitment level with the fun of magic...well, that's something that I want to be a part of .....

**ADB:** ...And we in The S.A.M are glad & fortunate that you are indeed a part ...an integral part. Like most Pros when I am "off-stage" I am not in the habit of making Predictions but I know that many of our friends will certainly support you in your campaign for 2nd VP. As a result, and as I mentioned in my intro above, I wholeheartedly endorse your running and eventually becoming President of our great Society. It has been my distinct privilege to have personally known and, in some instances, worked with many Past Presidents and so I can, with all due respect and humility, state that you will be a very worthy addition to the list. Without actually telling us your entire plans and indeed campaign strategy , what do you, in a couple of sentences, see as the main theme for your campaign?

**DS:** I want to do whatever I can to help grow the Society and to strengthen the middle word of our Kabala. Of course I am talking about the "Unity" of the S.A.M. I see "Magic" as the cornerstone of our organization. It is the thing that brings us together in the first place. And we have "Might" because of our combined strength as a group. However, the glue that holds the Magic and the Might together is our "Unity". This is our ethos and I believe that it is the very thing that separates The Society of American Magicians from other fraternal groups of magicians or entertainers.

**ADB:** Well, sounds like a good basis to me. I know for a fact, and this may embarrass you somewhat, but it needs to be publicly stated that you and Cinde( Dal's wife) worked tirelessly to provide & organize Entertainment for people in shelters and indeed organized funds from the S.A.M to aid fellow Magicians in distress after Texas and other places that got hit by Hurricanes Ike & Gustav soon after the 2008 TAOM. As you will recall, the Houston International airport was shut literally the day after I left. Houston got hit big time. Places I had been at a few days before were completely totaled. Cell phones and power were out, communication was not possible.

Fortunately, I managed to reach Walter Blaney, Bill Palmer and few other friends and my sisters via their land-lines. Katrina in New Orleans got world-wide news coverage; the scale of Ike and Gustav, was on par and in some cases more deadly than Katrina. Tell us a bit of days that followed and how you and others spread some cheer and smiles in the weeks that ensued.. . . .

**DS:** When I first became RVP, I expected the job to be great fun with very little stress. In fact, many officers and past officers described the job as "the most fun office in the S.A.M". I understood that my main job was to visit my assemblies and potential assemblies and to help spread S.A.M. goodwill. I started by taking my magic lecture to the various assemblies throughout Texas. As you already mentioned, shortly after I visited Houston, Hurricane Ike hit and suddenly all of my friends in the area were struggling just to maintain their lives. Some people did not get electricity back for 2½ months and one S.A.M. member still hasn't been able to move back into his home in Galveston more than a year later.

Brad Jacobs contacted me almost immediately. When he reached me on my mobile phone I was entertaining hurricane victims who were in shelters, trying to help them (especially the kids) forget about their plight for a little while. I could see the devastation on the faces of hundreds of people as P.N.P. Jacobs detailed what the Society could do through the Endowment Fund. All I had to do was to ascertain who needed help. Aid was not limited to members of the S.A.M. or even just to magicians. Help was also available to related entertainers including clowns or

jugglers. It took me over a month to track down the various Society members and other displaced entertainers because so many of them had fled to higher ground.

Being able to recognize and respond to these life-changing moments is just one of the things that make our Society great. While it is certainly true that “the most fun office in the S.A.M” became much more work for me, it was magnificent being able to work with Brad Jacobs and to help those people. I will always be thankful that I was able to serve those in their time of need.

**ADB:** I like Brad, he is, as my pal Walter Blaney would say, “one of the good guys in Magic”. I also like Brad a lot because he let me “steal” chips from his bowl all thru a S.A.M pre-Council meeting. But seriously Dal, how right you are and I appreciate you sharing those little known “behind the scenes” aspects of The S.A.M. Let’s converse a bit about our favorite topic. The Presentation & Performance of Magic , especially Stage Magic. Do you recall some of our conversations at The S.A.M 2007 convention in Dallas? We hung out with our dear friend Cherie Kay, and a few other notables in Chris Mitchell’s room slurping on Bud Lights and chatting about Stage Craft. I vividly remember you saying, “ If I see another Magician walk into his table on stage, I will yell!!!” You have been in the business as a Pro for over 30 years. Please share with us some of your thoughts on this most important aspect of Magic. . . .

**DS:** As you know, I was an actor long before I became a magician. While still in Junior High, I was taught the importance of blocking, rehearsal and memorizing a script. Too many magicians have no regard for these basics of stagecraft. They seem to believe that their “cleverness” can compensate for their lack of professionalism. It cannot. When an act bumps into his props, wanders aimlessly on stage or obviously doesn’t know what to say next then that performer makes all magicians look bad.

The general public thinks that everyone in the business is only as good (or as bad) as the most recent act they have seen. Entertainers are more forgiving because we know there are good acts and bad acts but the general public (our paying customers) do not realize this. Every time they see a magician, they judge all magicians by that act. They decide whether or not they want a magician at their event or in their theater or even at their kid’s party because of that most recent exposure to magic.

This is something else that our local S.A.M. assemblies often help with. They provide “would be” performers with the tools to not only fool people with their magic but to entertain audiences in a professional manner.

**ADB:** In my In Conversation article with George Saterial, he told me he preps by doing jumping jacks and then lying prone. Roy Davenport does the lying down prone thing, one well known pal of mine (no names ) sips whisky disguised as orange juice, we all have our ways of prepping before we go on . . Care to offer some tips and friendly advice to budding performers about Stage Fright?

**DS:** As I said, before I was a magician I was an actor.....so, for me, stage fright is good. When I am in “performance mode” those butterflies, help me to focus like a laser on my act. My concern with what might go wrong helps me to spot those potential problems before they even occur. It’s not uncommon for me to change portions of my show during the performance. Because my act is made up of several different “entertainment modules” I can unplug one module and replace it with another without interrupting the overall flow of the show. I call this “Flexible Modular Structuring” and as you know, it is something that I share in my lecture.

**ADB:** Do you prefer performing talking or musical routines?

**DS:** Although I also do illusions to music, I am primarily a talking comedy magician. I love making people laugh and say WOW! When doing larger shows, I will often work with several stage partners (notice I don’t refer to them as assistants). They include dancers, a juggler, a fire eater, a mime and other variety artists. The people in my show are more than just props or moving tables bringing me whatever apparatus I might need. I try to make them part of the show

by giving them lines and bits. It is not uncommon for the girls in my act to sign as many autographs as I do after a show because the audience has gotten to know them too.

**ADB:** As a Pro it is essential to stay fresh and create new routines, ideas, effects. How do you conduct that creative process for yourself?

**DS:** I create routines backwards. Many times I share some sort of message in my routines so that is where I start—even though it is the last thing you communicate in the routine it is the first thing I write. I will then look for effects that will help me to communicate that message. The last thing I write is the first part of the routine. Most people will pick an effect and try to make the message fit the prop. I will write the message first and then find a prop that will help me communicate that message. The prop or effect is simply how I get the attention of the audience and get them to pay attention. This is called “winning the right to be heard”. I go into greater depth on how to do this in my lecture.

**ADB:** You told me that your Magical knowledge has been greatly influenced by books. Is there one book that shaped your thinking ?

**DS:** My favorite magic resource book is the Tarbell Course in Magic. OK...it's seven books but you can create a whole show from them. My favorite book on kid's magic is Professional Magic for Children by David Ginn. It's full of great ideas and it was the first magic book to make me laugh out loud on a cross-country flight. My favorite close up book is Now You See It, Now You Don't by Bill Tarr because of the classic effects and the clear illustrations. For magical history I enjoy Illusion Show by David Bamberg and my current favorite is Foundations: The Art of Stage Magic by Eberhard Riese. For Christmas, I received an advance copy of Beating A Dead Horse, which is about the life of Jay Marshall. Since Jay was the mentor of my mentor (and someone that I got to know while he was alive) I am sure that this will become one of my favorites too.

**ADB:** Have you ever thought of writing a magic book?

**DS:** Even though I have made a career as an Entertainer, I have always seen myself as a writer. As you know, I have some very strong opinions about our art and how it should be performed.

Many of my friends in the business receive my monthly article The Magic Maniac where I discuss magic, the creative process, the business part of show business and anything else that might be on my mind. I suspect that these articles will eventually find their way into a book.

**ADB:** Keep me posted on that. I eagerly look forward to reading it when you publish it. Will it include dressing the part? I hope so, as I am not a big fan of some of today's Magicians who perform on Stage wearing their “Street” clothes. Yes, I know some of the big names do it and it's a kind of ‘in’ thing to do ..... but it has always seemed to me that audiences get short-changed if a Magician looks ordinary and not dressed in some way that conveys Magic ability. I am not saying everyone needs a tux or the top hat and tails and the elegance of a Channing Pollock or Cardini, but I think that, to quote Robert-Houdin an “ actor playing the part of a Magician” should at least look like a Magician. I bring this up because this was a topic I was talking to Jeff McBride about recently ...interestingly, you are one of the few people that impressed him because you looked like a Magician. Share that story with us and also the one were the young boy in Vegas asked for YOUR autograph.

**DS:** It's really simple. I believe that if you want to be successful then you need to look successful. I believe that entertainers should always dress nicer than their audience. I was told this by an agent who booked me for many of the television commercials and print jobs that I did in the eighties. She also pointed out that you never know when you might run into a client so you should always look good whenever you go out. Since I am a magician, I try to look the part. I will even shave and wear a nice shirt when I'm going to the Home Depot for supplies. When Jeff McBride performed & lectured at the Dallas Magic Club (S.A.M. Assembly 13) annual banquet, I dressed as if I were going to the theater. As he started the lecture part of his presentation he commented that in the room of magicians, I was the only person who actually

looked like a magician because of the way I was dressed. He pointed out that we should be magicians and performers 24/7.

I have always gauged my success by whether or not I was able to affect my audience (especially kids) and perhaps even effect a change in their lives. Several years ago, I was in Las Vegas in front of Treasure Island waiting for the Pirate Show. I was with several of the nation's top magicians, clowns and a juggler, I was definitely outclassed and I was very impressed with the famous people I was getting to hang out with. Suddenly a kid ran up to our group shouting —I know you – You're that magic guy. Image my surprise when I realized that he was talking to me. —You're Dal Sanders—You came to my school and taught us about building good character, —He went on. —I'll never forget you—How did you make that girl float in the air? I asked the boy where he was from and he told me that he was from Lawrence, Kansas (a town I had visited about 7 months earlier). I thanked him and sent him back to his parents (who were wondering, no doubt, who I was). I felt very successful that day.

**ADB:** I specifically asked you to tell the story about the young boy asking for your autograph in Vegas because one of your remarks that has been cemented firmly in my mind is when you said, “It is a sin to bore a child” . . . share with us that philosophy. . . .

**DS:** Actually there are two parts to that remark, the second part relates to adults; “It is bad business to bore an adult.” I tell people in my lecture that if you don't remember anything else from my lecture you should remember these two points. You see, what we do matters. It has an impact on people. I first realized this when I was pulled aside after a show and told about the little boy who had laughed so hard. He hadn't laughed at all since his Mommy had died earlier that year.

Another time a group of kids in a hospital show wouldn't let me leave until they all had a chance to draw me pictures of my show for my refrigerator. As they drew a nurse told me that for the most part they did not open up to many adults since it was the doctors and the nurses who always “hurt” them with their needles and procedures. At that point, I looked again and for the first time I realized that they were all bald. I can't tell you how many times a teacher has come up to me after a show to thank me for using this boy or that girl. Some of the kids were so shy that the teacher thought they would never participate, other times they were thrilled that I chose some “special needs” child.

It's not just children who respond like that. Many times, I have seen adults turn into kids with my performances. I believe that everyone turns seven when they see a magician but this will not happen if we are not working on several different levels at once. We have to entertain the adults in the audience as well as the kids.

It's not just me who has these experiences. If you talk to anyone who performs magic you will find that they have similar stories. What we do often has meaning and impact far beyond what we understand.

Being a magician is more than just a job. It is a calling similar to the calling that preachers have in the church. It is a calling to excellence. We have a responsibility to be the very best entertainer we can be. We should always push ourselves to raise the bar of our art. We (hopefully) get paid a fair price for doing something that we love and even though others might have more cash on hand than we do, we are in reality, wealthy beyond our wildest dreams. Let me say it again. For me, there are only two rules of magic 1. It is a sin to bore a kid and 2. It is bad business to bore an adult.

**ADB:** A calling. A calling to excellence. Yes! Exactly. Well said. Very well said. If only one magician reading this gets this crucial point, it will have been more than worthwhile creating this Conversation article. Let's talk a bit about Awards & Trophies; you in common with many successful Pros have never entered a Magic Competition but you have several Awards and Trophies. . . .

**DS:** I have never competed in a convention contest but I have received several awards for my work and my ideas including First Place in the 2008 —Out of the Box competition from Creative

Magic. My magic has also been recognized with several awards from corporations I have worked for. My mantel is also full of trophies and plaques that I have received for the work I have done on behalf of those less fortunate. They include accolades from The Women's Auxiliary for my work entertaining the Patients at Children's Medical Center in Dallas and for the work I did entertaining at shelters after Hurricane Katrina. I only got the chance to perform for the victims of Katrina because I refused to be told "no" by F.E.M.A. They were not going to allow me to entertain the kids until I told the guy with the clipboard who was guarding the door that his answer was not acceptable. Oddly enough, it's the recognition that I have received for my volunteer work that means the most to me.

**ADB:** Yes, I can relate to that; it is in the giving that we can share our Art and indeed makes a real difference, even if it is for a few moments, in someone's Life. But you also share in a different way as well. You and Cinde throw an annual party at your home and it is pretty much open house. How did that get started?

**DS:** Sure Tony. You are referring to our annual Summer Splash where entertainers are invited to come out, jump in the pool, burn some hotdogs, burn our shoulders, watch videos of other magicians and lie to each other. It started when we bought our house in Dallas, which was next door to another magician, Bob Karlbach and his wife Eve. The first splash was on the Fourth of July when a few Dallas entertainers happened to be not working. We had such a good time that we decided to make it an annual event but the next year we had it on the last Sunday in July so more people could come. My friend John Shryock was in town and it was also his birthday. Since then we have kept with the last Sunday in July because that is a day when many of our friends are not working. We have magicians from all over Texas and in fact, all over the United States come out for a little fun. It's a lot of work but it has become a bit of a tradition.

**ADB:** How do you feel when you see magic in the movies or on TV?

**DS:** Generally, I like magic on television and in films. It keeps the art —top of mind with audiences and that means people are more likely to consider a magician when they need an entertainer.

**ADB:** Each of us has many "on the road" stories. What kind of difficulties do you have when traveling?

**DS:** Remembering to pack enough underwear.

**ADB:** He! He! Well, I did ask!!! Well, that's why they have Wal-Mart in every town! You and I know of stories from others and indeed ourselves where Wal-Mart, especially the 24 hour stores have helped during road trips in the US. You have traveled extensively, actually in all 50 States as I mentioned earlier and lectured to several Clubs. As we chatted earlier, I was at your Houston, Texas lecture. Truly Excellent. But there's a "trial by fire " story on your first ever lecture . Care to share it?

**DS:** Sure. My first lecture was for a group of corporate entertainers that I am associated with. My lecture was sandwiched between lectures by Kevin James and Mac King. I didn't know that they were going to be at the event until the day it took place. Needless to say, I was sweating cats with Kevin and Mac sitting in the audience. When I asked Aye Jaye (the man who booked me for the conference) why he didn't tell me that they would also be there he simply asked if I would have agreed to do my lecture if I had known. I told him of course not and he just shrugged and said that's why I didn't tell you. That lecture went great and I have done many lectures since that time.

**ADB:** How do you find work? Do you use an agent or book yourself?

**DS:** I use several agents but I also own an agency of sorts. Amazing Attractions is a co-op of entertainers who work together to share expenses, leads and resources in order to generate performance opportunities for the entire group.

We offer magicians, jugglers, illusionists, clowns, mimes, fire-eaters, and other variety entertainers. When you call, you might speak to a magician, a clown, a juggler or any one of the other entertainers.

The company takes 20% of the profits but no one gets a paycheck from that money, instead it is put back into the company for expenses like advertising, utilities or office/rehearsal space. I started this co-op because I believe that our business shouldn't be competitive but collaborative. I have found that there is plenty of work out there for people who have a good act.

**ADB:** What was or is your favorite venue to perform at?

**DS:** The Majestic Theater in my town...Dallas, Texas

**ADB:** Wow! I love that theater. I've never performed there but been in the audience. Great place . Great history. Project into the future. Where do you see yourself 5 to 10 years from now?

**DS:** I would love to have a theater where my company and I could perform a beautiful show of magic and comedy from the heart much like Le Grande David in Beverly, MA.

**ADB:** Wouldn't surprise me in the least if that happened. Just be sure to reserve me a seat. Front row of course and a Comp ticket!!! Dal it has been great. Thank you for conversing and sharing.

**DS:** Tony, you are very welcome. The seat will have your name on it.

### **Additional Thoughts**

Since writing this article, I saw Dal again at The S.A.M National Council meeting in Colorado Springs , Colorado in November 2010. In fact , we were room-mates as he kindly shared his room with me. Later in the early Spring of 2011, he came over to Europe with his wife Cinde, to perform and lecture. We all had a great time together and many photos of all that were shared on facebook. In 2013, He will become President of The Society of American Magicians.

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