



## **Anthony Darkstone Brook In Conversation With Doc Haliday**

I love the Old West. I love collecting Western memorabilia. I love Texas and in particular the "cowtown" of Fort Worth. Although the International airport has the designation of DFW (Dallas/Fort Worth) the city of Fort Worth is a separate city and is often referred to as, "where the West begins". Established originally in 1849 as an Army outpost overlooking the Trinity River, the city was named after Major General William Jenkins Worth (1794-1849) and is the 18th largest city in the USA and the 5th largest in the State.

I've been to a couple of The TAOMs there. At the 2008 TAOM , I Hosted and Produced a Talk Show featuring a great Texas Magician , Walter "Zaney" Blaney who opened my show wearing a Stetson and twirling a lariat.

Ft. Worth has Will Rogers, the Stockyards, Sundance Square, Billy Bob's, the world's greatest & largest Honky Tonk Bar and some of the best Magicians in Texas. One such Magician goes by the name of Doc Haliday. I first met Doc in the lobby of The Worthington Hotel. He looked splendid. He had stepped right out of my favorite book & series, "Lonesome Dove". In full western regalia including chaps & spurs, he was being friendly and helpful to all the Convention attendees. I went up to him, said Howdy and introduced myself. To my surprise, he knew who I was and we instantly, in Western parlance, became good pardos. I told him I loved his authentic outfit and in particular his Lawman's badge. During our ensuing conversation he discovered I was a Collector and immediately offered to give me a badge from his collection. This he did the next day. It has pride of place in my collection.

There's an old Rodeo saying, " There ain't a horse that cain't be rode and there ain't a cowboy that cain't be throwed" . I heard Doc had taken a spill and so I called him up to chew the fat.

**ADB:** Hello Doc. Been a while. Heard you tried to rearrange your bones and have to take it easy for a while.

**DH:** Howdy, Tony. I did do some damage to my back and now I am healing up just fine but I have to learn to walk again.

**ADB:** That's a tough break but good to hear you are on the mend. How & why that happened is done with. Let's focus on the fact you are healing and all is moving in the direction of positive progress. You know I love The West and I love Magic . You have successfully combined both. Let's talk about your Magical Character and how you came up with your Performing Persona...

**DH:** Sure Tony. Be happy to. I have done a lot of work both doing caricatures and magic in Old West reglia. The idea of Western wear began in the late '80s. After I retired from the USAF, I sold homes and insurance for a while but had always wanted to see if I could make a living drawing caricatures. I had started doing caricatures while I was still in service; they were parting gifts for people who were leaving our unit. I was in San Antonio at this time, which was a big tourist and convention destination. After my first day of drawing, I was successful and never looked back. I formed a loose partnership with another caricaturist, and we decided that people coming to Texas from other states or countries expected to see Cowboys, so we determined we'd show them Cowboys; we put together boots, chaps, spurs, bandanas, ten gallon hats, tied-

down gunbelts and law badges. We called ourselves The Infamous Cartoon Posse. We even had badges made up with that name on them. There were just the two of us but we had enough bandanas, gunbelts, badges and hats that we could outfit eight or so other caricature artists for western themed events. We worked many conventions that way.

**ADB:** This wasn't just in Texas was it?

**DH:** No, I've traveled to other States to do conventions where I was asked to wear my western duds. Let me tell you, I drew a lot of attention walking around Atlanta and Orlando in my chaps and spurs. I also have the dressy western costume. of course, with the long frocked coat, colorful brocaded vest with watch chain and fob, topped off with an appropriate western hat. It's the Western Saloon gambler look.

You asked about my Stage name ...well, how I came to use my stage name, DOC HALIDAY: in the late '80s, when I started to costume up for catching tourists in San Antonio, I wanted a name from the Old West that everyone could recognize. Most people have heard of Doc Holiday, famous along with the Earp brothers for the gunfight at the OK Corral. I took that with a little bit of personalization; since my first name is HAL, I made it Doc HALiday. When I began to perform, my tag line was "A Magic Moment with Doc Haliday". Most people don't even get the subtlety of the change in spelling.

**ADB:** I guess not. But once they do it makes perfect sense. I know when I first heard it I thought the person had made a mistake referring to you. However, the subtlety works just fine. About the Performing outfit. You and I both feel strongly about the Magician dressing the part ...share with us some of your thoughts ...

**DH:** Well, Tony like I said. The look is important when performing. Along the lines of costuming, I adopted bright jackets, sequined vests, and even bowler hats to match, to do my magic. I always felt I should look sharp and different from my audience. Of course, I've done shows in a tux but even then it's with a sequined vest and matching bow tie. This is for magic and caricaturing. I deplore the thought of an artist or magician showing up to an event and being too casually attired.

**ADB:** I absolutely agree with that. I really cannot see the point in performing in street clothes . This is a my favorite soap -box topic so let me not get started..... You spent some time in the military way before you were Doc Haliday.....

**DH:** Yes I did. I'm honored to say, I am a retired Master Sergeant, having served 22 1/2 years in the U.S. Air Force. And of course, what I do today is so totally different from my years in uniform, that I am constantly amazed. I'm even amazed that I do anything in front of people at all, for most of my early life I was so introverted that I had a hard time talking to more than three people at one time. I would literally get sick to my stomach at the thought. Thank God those days are long behind me.

**ADB:** I recall hearing somewhere that although you have been performing for a while , you didn't get into Magic until quite late in Life.

**DH:** That's right Tony. I was born in the 40's during WWII in a very small town in Louisiana, just north of the Cajun country. I was born 6 months after my father was shipped overseas and he didn't see me until I was almost three years old. My earliest memory of seeing a magician was a school program early in my high school years. While I don't remember the magician or the magic, I do remember his running gag: he was bald and in between tricks would comb his scalp with an outsized comb. He must have made some sort of impression if I can still recall that after 50 years. I am different from most of the magicians I know who all seem to have an interest in magic since childhood when they were given their first magic kit. I did not develop an interest until I was in my early 50's.

**ADB:** What triggered that?

**DH:** I was working a party as a caricature artist. They had also hired a strolling magician. Several times during the evening this magician (and I wish I can remember who he was) came

over to "work" my line of people who were waiting to be drawn. I was working with my back to him so I couldn't see what he was doing but I heard the reaction of the people. I took note of the fact that they continued to talk about his magic for ten or fifteen minutes after he had walked away.

That impacted me greatly. Having people talk about you well after you had finished. Very impressive. I thought to myself, "What a great way to interact with people, what a great way to influence them." That inspired me to take a magic course being offered in the local area.

I learned a few tricks there and began to haunt the local magic shops in Dallas and Fort Worth. Within a year, I was out working small venues. I became a little more sophisticated as time went along, began to hone my skills and gain confidence. I joined the Fort Worth IBM Ring and SAM Assembly, eventually held several offices in the Fort Worth Magicians Club. I was honored to be named Magician of the Year for 2007-2008.

**ADB:** Congratulations Doc. Richly deserved. As you know, I know many of the boys (and gals) out your way and they are all pretty good. A few of them have been, or soon will be, featured in my series. Dal Sanders, Chuck Lehr, to name but a few ...So getting that accolade was real special. You've worked a lot of different venues and kept busy for the past 18 years. What is your preferred type of gig?

**DH:** Although, I've worked many venues both large and small, I've had the most fun working children's birthday parties. As I mentioned earlier, I'm a pretty good caricature artist . I don't mean to brag but because I had skills in both areas I offered Mom entertainment for all the guests and then I would draw a very nice picture of the birthday child, so Mom got to keep something special to hang on her wall. No other magician in the Dallas/Fort Worth area could offer a package like that. It got me a lot of work, and of course, time permitting I would draw other family members or guests (for an additional fee, you understand). I do a pretty fine job of drawing children, making them all look like little angels, so the interest in drawing other than the birthday child was usually great. I figured if I had both skills ...I should make use of them. I have to tell you that as much as I enjoy performing at different venues, I'm happier doing close up and parlor magic for children than anything else I may have done. I have no grandchildren, so I get to play some one else's grandkids for just a little while.

**ADB:** That's interesting and what's more you provide a unique Birthday package. You obviously are very successful at it and have been working steadily for many years ..is there a formula?

**DH:** Well, I don't really know ..if there is a formula , I guess, if there is one, it is loving what I do. I've had no formal training in stagecraft or how to develop a personae, I just do what feels right to me. I want to be me when I'm in front of an audience, I want to be natural, but I try very hard to be entertaining.

**ADB :** And you sure are entertaining ...what is your primary goal as a Magical Entertainer?

**DH:** I don't consciously have a goal but here's how I see it . Even though it might be my 2302nd show , it is their first show with me... and so, after people see me perform, I want them to go away with a good feeling, maybe a smile on their face. I want them to know that they and I have all had a good time, that we've shared something special. When I leave a child's party, I want them to feel like I'm their favorite uncle who's leaving after a too brief visit.

**ADB:** That must be a very rewarding feeling. Speaking of children's birthday parties, you told us about the caricatures, but I'm curious about one thing ...do you perform as Doc Holiday or do you create another persona?

**DH:** I do perform using the name of Doc Haliday almost exclusively but sometimes I am more into the character than at other times. When I'm in the western costume I am more broad in my gestures and I use western slang and euphemisms as I'm talking with my audience. You have to do that, it comes with the territory. You can't wear a Tom Mix-style, ten-gallon Stetson and

speak in an off-hand manner. It's always, "Howdy, folks" when you meet 'em and sage cowboy advice to "Never squat with your spurs on", as you leave 'em. As a matter of fact, I use the same style of message on my answering machine.

**ADB:** I have the greatest admiration for anyone who can entertain children. You've had a wealth of experience in this area. Based on your experience from all the hundreds of shows what do you consider to be the most important things in this type of show? What inside tips would you give to a young Magician starting out?

**DH:** You have to play to your audience, play to their level. I take a lot of effects into a birthday party and I'll decide on the spot which ones to show a particular audience as I'm looking them in their little eyes. Their response to an effect is feedback and I use that to decide what to show them next. I don't know anyone else who works exactly this way, but it works for me. Each party and event is a little unique, I'm not sure there's such a thing as a "typical party". My only tip is to get out there and find out what works for you and then run with it. Someone starting out will need confidence and the only way to build that confidence is by doing.

**ADB:** Does that mean you have a special performing philosophy?

**DH:** Truthfully Tony, no. I don't have any deep philosophy about performing and I don't want to over analyze what's worked well for me. I do what I do because it feels instinctively right to me and I've had a heck of a good time for many years. It's been a good run. Do I need more than that? Hopefully, my spine and legs will heal up real soon and in time & I'll be up and performing again. I trust it will be so, because I miss it greatly.

**ADB:** I don't think it's time to hang up your spurs just yet. I'm sure you will be up and performing real soon. Look at this way, all this resting, gives you a chance to practice more sleights. Just kidding Doc. However, to be serious for a moment, I can, in a way empathize with you. A few years back, I also had to take it easy for a few weeks; by the fifth day of the first week, I had enough and was totally fed up with sleights and passes. But I know what you mean ...we miss the rush of performing and the interplay with audiences. I know you've had more than just a few weeks , you've had almost a whole year of resting up and healing but pretty soon, like I said, you'll be back ....

**DH:** That I will, but I know it will take some time and effort. I am very aware that many magicians work diligently to market themselves, I consider myself lucky in that I was known and appreciated by most of the party planners and agents in North Texas and that, through them, I had more than enough work to keep me busy for the past 17 years. That will flow again.

**ADB:** That it most certainly will. Thanks Doc. I appreciate you taking time out to converse a while.

**DH:** My pleasure Tony.. So long Pard. See you down the trail sometime soon. And remember "Always drink upstream from the herd."

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