



## Anthony Darkstone Brook In Conversation With Lupe Nielsen

Anyone who meets Lupe immediately feels a sense of enchantment. She is one of those rare kind of people who has been gifted with a wonderful instantly likeable quality. She puts that to good use when performing her unique kind of magic. The most perfect mis-direction is her grace and charm. Little wonder that she is considered to be one of the leading Magicennes of our time.

I was fortunate to meet her on several occasions and more recently spent a wonderful time with her, her husband Norm and their very magical dog Misty at their home in a Las Vegas suburb. I am looking forward to visiting with them once again later this year.

If you are at a Convention in the near future and she and Norm are there make a point of going up to them and introduce yourself. I promise you right here and now, publicly and in writing, that it will be a delightful and very magical experience.

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



**ADB:** Hello Lupe. Thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule to converse. You tend to keep yourself very much under the radar and in many ways, unlike most Magic folk who seek publicity you tend to keep away from the spotlight.

**LN:** Hi there Tony. It is I who has to thank you for the interview. Although I do enjoy magic in general, I am a "backstage" person at heart. I like all the perks of being in the magic business without having to be in the spotlight all the time. In this world of My Space, Twitter, FaceBook, I am still one of the few people left that does like to enjoy a sense of privacy. At this time I am

quite content with running Nielsen Magic, which keeps Norm and I fairly busy on a full time basis.

**ADB:** Absolutely. I understand what you mean. Of course, Norm is a true living legend and as you know, I was honored to feature him earlier this year in my In Conversation series. We shall talk about you both a bit later but I'm keen to know a bit more about your early days....

**LN:** I was born in Panama City, Panama in 1966. A friend of the family, who was not a magician, showed me my first magic trick when I was four. This was the trick where you show the upright portrait of Washington on a dollar bill. You then fold the bill, and when you open it, the portrait is upside down. I was very analytical as a child and that puzzle fascinated me. I liked magic so much that the first book I pulled out of the library when I was in first grade was a magic book for children. And that is how things started...

**ADB:** What a wonderful start. Many of our fellow performers can relate to that feeling. It is indeed an inexplicable thrill to look through the pages of our first magic book. I know about the cliché of being hooked on Magic but I agree there is really no other better way to describe the passion that we feel for our Art. So when did you start performing?

**LN:** Like most people that start magic as kids, the first person we drive crazy are the people in our family. My mother must have picked cards hundreds of times. My first props were quite crude. I made a Square Circle out of cardboard. The Square container was a box with a window in it. The external tube was a Quaker Oat Meal container, and the internal secret load chamber was a smaller diameter cardboard tube. Everything was painted with enamel paints, which I would pick up at a nearby hardware store. When I was nine, I had the gumption of doing a show for the neighborhood kids, at my next door neighbor's apartment. At the end of the show the mother gave me a \$5 dollar bill (probably because I kept the kids entertained and out of her hair for an hour or so). Wow, I figured, I can get money for the stuff I do.

After a couple of years, when I was twelve, I used to watch a live children's show on television. I said to myself, I bet I can be on television. The following week I took the bus to the television station and asked the secretary that I wanted to see the producer of the show. She smiled and told me that he went out for lunch. After getting the name of the restaurant from her, I just walked in and as he was having lunch asked him if I could be on his show. He asked, "What do you do?" I said, "Magic". I suppose he figured he had nothing to lose, so he said, "Sure, come in next Saturday."

After that show, my phone would not stop ringing. By the time I was in my teens I had many shows under my belt and was doing five shows each weekend.

**ADB:** Amazing! Just goes to show us all what can be done with a lot of charm & determination. Your show schedule ...that was some tough schedule, even for a seasoned Pro..... and there you were a teenager doing that ... what kind of shows were you doing?

**LN:** Everything...Mostly worked at children's birthday parties, I did some stage for company parties, and a little close-up.

**ADB:** You are best known for your close-up skills. Tell us a little about that.

**LN:** That question requires an elaborate answer, because I started doing close-up magic as a necessity, in my later years when I came to the United States. During my teenage years, I was also interested in theater. There were about five live theaters in Panama at the time, and I went to see every single play I could see at the time. After my regular school, I enrolled in the National School of Theater, where I hung out in the afternoons. When I went to College in the States, I dropped magic and went to study Theater.

During my last year of College, I was offered several jobs as a stage carpenter, and even in stage-managing. The problem with these is that I did not have a car, and the initial jobs did not pay enough to get me out of Blacksburg, Virginia, where I was studying. Busch Gardens in Williamsburg, Virginia, was auditioning at the time for close-up magicians, and I figured I could

give that a try. I practiced four tricks and I was booked on the spot! So that is how I started doing close-up.

As far as my magic skills are concerned, I am a poor judge of them. Because of time constraints, I cannot practice as much as I would like. The way I approach learning is by determining what effect I want to do and practice that particular trick to accomplish that specific goal. I am not good at memorizing too many moves if these don't get me to reach the latter goal.

**ADB:** Well, be that as it may but I have to tell you that you are indeed a poor judge of your skills. And you know what? That is a good thing because in my personal and professional view, it is precisely because of that you are able to perform some truly amazing magic. Let's quote someone who is most qualified to comment on your work. Phil Wilmarth. As many of us know Phil was the Editor of The Linking Ring and then President of the IBM. It would be fair to say, he has seen, read and commented on more Magic than most of us will ever get to know or experience in a several lifetimes. Back in 2007 at the SAM Convention in Dallas, Texas, I Hosted & Produced a Talk Show entitled, "Tony Brook in Conversation with Maria Ibanez". Phil was my other guest on the show. As you can imagine, his words on Magic and Magicians were most enthralling.

His comments on the Art are indeed most valid. Here is what he said about you, "Lupe is able to tease her audience and execute sleights beyond most of us"

**LN:** I don't know how to respond to that except to say I am honored that such kind words are used to describe my work. If I recall correctly, that was soon after I had performed at the IBM Convention in 1997 in Minneapolis.

**ADB:** Your style as I mentioned earlier is enhanced by your own natural grace and charm. Two formidable "props" when performing Close-Up Magic. Although I perform few Close-Up effects myself I am not a Close-up magician, but I greatly love Close-up magic and appreciate the skill involved. It is, if you pardon the obvious, up-close and personal. I have had many conversations on this with dear Jon Racherbaumer. Close-up Magic is a vast topic but share with us some of your thoughts on this?

**LN:** Close Up Magic is exactly what it is implied by that term – magic performed close to the audience. You see, when you perform stage magic, there is a distance between you and the audience. If you perform on television, there is camera in between.

Close up breaks down one more logical barrier between the performer and the audience. Once you bring the magic up to their noses and in front of their eyes, the possible explanation of distance or camera trickery is gone.

The first requirement of good magic is the material you choose. Your first and foremost goal as a magician is to fool people, completely and with no mercy – to absolutely shatter any shred of logic in the mind of your audience. Once you have that, then the rest is gravy on the meat. The gravy is that you have to present such material in an entertaining manner, as you don't want people to walk away from you.

It is key that a close up worker has great communication skills, and speaks well.

The nature of Close-Up Magic demands that the performer develops a relationship with the audience, a relationship that creates a rapport. You must really care about your audience and you must give them a reason to care about you.

Eventually, the goal of any great performer (a lofty goal which I am still in search of), is to transcend the mundane and create a sensation of true Wonder. It is a very rare treat when you see a performer who can achieve that goal. In magic, René Lavand reveals his soul to his audience with every performance, and the late Jay Marshall always moved the audience like no other when performing Lefty.

**ADB:** Couldn't agree with you more. All that you said is absolutely true. Yes indeed. René Lavand conveys all of that and more but personally, his best Magic for me is the fact that he makes me forget he is doing all of this with just one hand!

**LN:** Yes Tony. When you can transcend your limitations and make things look effortless, that is truly a great skill.

**ADB:** How very true. Over the years you have had some great Mentors and pretty much met everyone worth meeting. Are you influenced by any one magician in particular?

**LN:** I have been so lucky to have met so many people that have helped me along the way. My first mentor was Scotty York who taught me the importance of proper and logical routing. Scotty could take a mundane routine and make it look like a piece of art after he finished with it. He would reduce the number of moves, change the timing, and give it logical meaning. Michael Skinner showed me how beautiful magic really could look. Johnny Thompson is a prince, he helps me with any question I might have on magic. He is a living encyclopedia. And of course Norm gives me great feedback. If something really sucks he just walks away.

**ADB:** He! He! I'm sorry but that remark about Norm made me chuckle. Nevertheless, he's right. If it sucks, walk away! As we evolve as Performers, we tend to gain a better and deeper appreciation for our Art. But this takes all kinds of experience. Let's talk a little more about your first few years in the US.

**LN:** As mentioned earlier, I was active in magic during my teenage years, and studied theater at the National School of Theater in Panama. I then came to the US and earned a degree in Theater (Technical Theater) at Virginia Tech in 1988. Later worked at Busch Gardens, Williamsburg, for two seasons, in 1988 and 1989. I did 600 shows during the first season. I then went to Northern Virginia (the Washington D.C. area) where I performed at private events, restaurants, a dinner theatre and even did magic bartending for a couple of years.

**ADB:** It was during that time you met Norm...

**LN:** Yes Tony. I first met Norm at Hank Lee's magic Conclave in 1989. We kept in touch, and I later moved to Las Vegas in 1995, when we got to know each other better. We were married on 2 May 1998.

**ADB:** And you have been here in Vegas ever since, working hard ...

**LN:** Well... yes and no...Because when you work at something you like, it doesn't feel like work anymore. We run Nielsen Magic, half of it consists of the small props we make and sell, and the other half which is buying, trading, selling and collecting vintage magic posters. Our hobby occupies our time for the most part. And of course, you have been at our home where we have a little museum with approximately 500 vintage posters on display.

**ADB:** Indeed, I have been at your home. Thank you. What a delightful experience. A very real thrill being given a tour of your Poster museum. I wrote a bit about that in my In Conversation article with Norm. As you know, a lot of my work takes me to Vegas these days and I'm looking forward to visiting you both again and sipping some of Orson Welles' favorite white wine with Norm. But it is not just home is it? It is the workshop and office for Nielsen Magic. Share some of that with us ...

**LN:** Well, Tony as you have seen, we have a lot of work to do here. Although we share the workload, each of us has specific tasks. I handle the business end which can be anything from paying a bill, going to the bank, packaging an order for shipping, answering phones and in general the business of running the business. Although Norm does this too, he mostly does his work in the workshop, building props and all the tasks that need to be done to create our line of products.

So, one minute I could be sending a fax and doing accounting and the next I could be in the workshop sanding down an Okito box. I come back from a meeting at the bank and the next

thing I may be doing is soldering metal or pouring latex into a dove or designing our next ad for a magazine. Or, I might be up a ladder changing the bulb for a spotlight shining over a poster in the museum. As I said earlier, it is often hard work but I feel lucky to do something I love with someone I love in my chosen profession. It can't get much better than that.

**ADB:** No. It certainly can't. You had some previous background and experience at this right?

**LN:** Yes Tony. I think you are referring to my time when I worked for Collector's Workshop in Middleburg, Virginia (1993– 1995), where I learned a lot about prop construction from Nick Ruggiero and the craftsmen at that business. I also worked for various magic shops in the past: Hank Lee's Magic, and Geno Munari's Houdini's Shop in the Fall of 1995, and I also actually started working with Norm since 1995 as well.

**ADB:** Earlier you spoke about changing a light bulb in the Poster Museum. That is a truly Magical and wondrous place. Naturally, you are also very much involved with the Poster side of the business. Share a little of that with us....

**LN:** By being involved in all aspects of the business, and given the fact that magic posters comprise half of it, it is only natural that I know and learn about them. We buy, sell and trade them. Often, we travel to far places to view or purchase them. Norm and I do love the posters, and there is a story behind each piece we acquire.

**ADB:** Norm told me that he now has done enough traveling and prefers the comfort of his own home and bed. How about you?

**LN:** Well, I am pretty much the same. Although Norm has retired from performing, I still do perform occasionally. We do travel once in a while, to purchase posters or as dealers in a few magic conventions. We do prefer the comfort of our home, and people now come and visit to view the poster collection. However, the thing I do value about travel is the human interaction between people of other cultures. It subconsciously widens our view of the world, and makes us realize that we, as human beings, are basically the same. Traveling to other countries does increase my sense of American patriotism.

**ADB:** As someone who has done his fair share of travel over the years, I agree completely with your excellent observations. Nowadays, like you and Norm, I travel much less but still find that meeting new people is a good way of understanding the world. Well, Lupe it has come to the time to bid you a fond farewell but I can't finish our conversation with mentioning a Magical Star that I fell in love with when I visited your home and that is your dog Misty.

**LN:** Yes Tony and she loves you too. I know you love dogs. Norm and I are very fortunate to have such a wonderful dog. I picked her up when I went to visit friends in Virginia seven years ago. She is part of the family.

**ADB:** Lupe, it has been fun. Thank you for taking the time to converse a while. I look forward to meeting up again real soon.

**LN:** Tony, it has been a pleasure. Look forward to seeing you again.

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