



Anthony Darkstone Brook In Conversation With Steve Dacri

Steve Dacri and I have been friends for many years and had many common interests apart from Magic. I was fortunate to know him quite well and to get to know the Steve behind the Performer and Showbiz star.

Sadly, he left us in February 2011. Just a few days before his demise we were talking on the phone and as usual we were joking about topics that amused us. It was a huge shock to hear that he had suddenly passed away. I owe him a lot and he was a close family friend.

This was the first sit down public chat we had published. Else where, in this section , we have another. Due to contractual commitments I could not attend his memorial service in Vegas but my tribute was read at the service. It is fitting that I include it at the end of this article.

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Steve Dacri is very cool. I know it's not cool to say cool any more but it is the word that describes him perfectly. Nothing fazes him. Well, not so that anyone would notice. He is truly 100% professional. Jon Racherbaumer, who is a mutual friend of ours, once told me that the true essence of magic is a magician who possesses the ultimate skill. What is the ultimate skill? Simply put, it is the ability to disguise the technical skill within the performance. It is the ability to cause an audience not just to suspend its dis-belief but to totally become so wrapped up in watching the performance that they forget it is a trick. Steve Dacri can do that and does it excellently.

In August 2003, I hung out with him and Jan and watched his flawless performances every night for two weeks at The Orleans Hotel & Casino in Vegas. Even though I knew what was coming next he never failed to blow me away (and the rest of the audience) each & every time. As you read through my interview you will discover how he got the tag of " the fastest hands in magic" . The man who attributed that to him knew about magic and magicians.

For those of us old enough to remember Lee Majors in 'The Six Million Dollar Man' will remember that whenever they wanted to show on screen that something was happening at super-speed they used a great camera technique of actually slowing the movement down.

Watching Steve Dacri being the fastest hands in magic is a similar experience. His hands move at immense speed but no one ever notices because somehow he makes it appear that they are moving normally.

I've seen quite a few excellent close-up magicians in my time and even been a Close-Up judge. I can unequivocally state that I've seen some of the best. Watching Steve Dacri is an experience on a whole new level. His dedication to the art and his wealth of experience is obvious within the first few moments. As a Close-Up magician he is totally unique. To the best of my knowledge, he is the only magician who does a Torn Corner card effect using an entire set of drums. You have to see this to believe it. His effects, his patter and the effortless manner

in which magic happens in his hands, quite literally, right under the noses of the audience is something to see.

He holds an MIMC with Gold Star at the prestigious Magic Circle, is a member of the IBM and SAM and has appeared at many conventions over the years and does a knock-out lecture and workshop. We have been buddies for quite a while and share a liking for Martini's, good cigars and fresh basil. And yes! He does make great Martinis. I know!



ADB: Thanks for getting together with me Steve. I'll shoot you some questions and just feel free to answer them any way you like. I'd like to begin by asking you the standard cliché question....namely, How did you get started in magic?

SD: As most will tell you, my beginning can be traced to that Mandrake the Magician magic set. I remember sitting at the kitchen table with my dad while he read through the instructions, and I picked up the ball and vase, and within minutes, I was fooling him with it. The Siberian chain escape, cups and balls, my first set of sponge bunnies, I remember them all vividly from that first set. Little did I know that I would still be playing with those same toys at this stage in my life. I was 6 (as Vernon said, I wasted my first 5 years) when my dad gave me a "Mandrake the Magician" magic kit, and the curse has been with me ever since. I did the ball and vase and sponge bunnies immediately and still do those silly bunnies now as my opening bit here in Vegas. (I walk into the crowd, front row center, and do it with 3 different spectators, ending with the big bunny before getting back onto the stage and starting the formal show)

I was always fascinated with magic and the reactions one gets from spectators, and being an only child, I used my alone time to begin the practice process I still use today. I naturally watched magic on TV every chance I could, and was hypnotized by a show called "Magic Land of Alakazam" starring Mark Wilson...so much so that I would begin to teach myself many of the tricks he did, including some of the illusions which I made myself from boxes and wood...

When I moved to California in the 70's, Mark Wilson and I become friends, and to this day, we talk often and discuss magic and television aspects of it all the time.

ADB: What was the defining moment that made you turn professional?

Ironically, it was my first television appearance. I say "ironically", as I was petrified, and still to this day recall the feeling of my legs shaking while standing in front of the big camera under the hot studio lights. The show was called "Ratherdo", a children's show, and it was back in the days of live television. I kept thinking that if something goes wrong, I'd be toast. But when it was over, I remember standing on the set, looking around, and a light bulb went off in my head. This is what I want to do forever, I thought. Luckily, I got over the scared part and now look forward to each and every appearance, on television or on stage. From that moment on, I began shaping my professional approach, from the marketing, selling and advertising to the actual formation of specific performances for every type of show.

ADB: You are credited with having the fastest hands in magic? Who coined this description of you and how did it come about?

Milbourne Christopher made the remark after a performance of mine in New York City many lifetimes ago. Then a newspaper columnist repeated it in an article on me, and it just stuck. Before that, I used "The Master of Magic" as my title, but after the fastest hands thing came out, I knew it was a more suitable moniker.

ADB: You have appeared on many of the major TV talk shows in the USA. Would you please share with us some of your most memorable experiences on these shows?

With so many television appearances under my belt, you can imagine that I have many, many fond memories. Most of them involve working with some of the greatest names in show business. I have been extremely lucky to have been on TV with some true legends, and in almost every case, they were all so accommodating and extremely fun to work with. I recall the very first national TV show, with the one and only Milton Berle. It was another live show, and it was a lot of fun. Berle played the part of the perfect foil, doing his best to make me look good, and sitting at a table with him and the host, I fooled him badly, as he confirmed later. It was an experience I will never forget.

Even more fun for me was AFTER the show, when we both sat in our dressing room and he told me show business stories, we showed each other card tricks, and talked about magic for almost three hours. On another show, with Joey Bishop, I made him so frustrated he kept yelling at me and telling the audience how angry I was making him. It made for a great segment.

Merv Griffin was the most enjoyable host to work with, and he had me on his show seven times. Once, with Tony Curtis, we did magic while seated at a table, and joked about Tony's role as Houdini. Before the show, I taught Tony Curtis a magic trick that he later presented during our segment together. When the segment ended, I was finished, and headed to my dressing room. The director came to me and said that another guest had not arrived, and would I like to do another segment. Of course I said SURE and although I had not prepared anything else, I ran to my dressing room, grabbed some coins and another deck of cards and did another segment, with the adrenaline pumping!

ADB: You are now one of the most sought after close-up/parlour magicians but in the past you also got involved in some large scale magic. I am thinking here about the time some years ago when you performed Houdini's Water Torture Escape for a live TV audience...recount for us the events surrounding that amazing performance....

As I have always focused on close-up magic, but I have been known to present a large scale illusion show, not something many magicians are aware of. I did that show for a number of years at corporate events only, and still occasionally have a client request some version of that show, at which point I head over to Johnny Gaughan's shop and dig out the props and begin the rehearsal process again!

My publicist had been toying with the idea of some sort of a "stunt" to create publicity...such ideas as hanging from the top of a building upside down in a straight jacket escape (not in your life) or "buried alive" (I may be crazy, but I'm not stupid!) were kicked around. I suggested, as a tribute to Houdini, a re-creation of his famous Underwater Escape, to be presented on Hollywood Boulevard, on the very star that Houdini has on the "Walk of Fame". I had no idea how to do the trick, but figured it would be an easy thing to master (I love challenges!).

How wrong I was! I went to see Walter Gibson at his home in upper state New York with a bottle of scotch and a tape recorder. By the time it was empty (the bottle, not the tape recorder) Walter had shown me the actual notebooks that belonged to Houdini and discussed the method he used to bring about this great escape. I then went to see Johnny Gaughan, who built the tank, and began a seven week program of practice and conditioning.

It was arranged that I would present the trick live on ABC television, permits were secured for closing Hollywood Boulevard for an hour, and a huge crane was erected on the sidewalk next to the tank. I practiced the various elements of the trick, mainly the holding my breath for two minutes part while chained to a giant weight on the bottom of the tank. I never did the trick until the night before, once, in the parking lot, with the headlights of a few cars illuminating the tank. I nearly passed out, had to come out long before I was supposed to, it was a complete disaster.

The next day, I somehow pulled it off on television, it went without a hitch, and the amount of press we received was astounding. Within a few weeks, my agent called and said he had an offer for me to repeat the trick, this time on the stage of Radio City Music Hall. I was stunned, and although I vowed to never get into the tank again, the money was too good to pass up, as well as the opportunity to fulfil a childhood dream of playing on that famous stage. I will never forget the experience, as it almost ended in tragedy. The Readers Digest version of the Radio City Music Hall performance:

I was about to be lowered into the tank, hanging upside down, swinging back and forth, looking out at 6,000 faces, memorizing the moment...then I was lowered to the top of the tank, my hands just breaking the surface of the ICE COLD water. It is at this point that the lowering stops and I do my deep breathing before being lowered the rest of the way into the water. They wait for my signal. I take my final breath, then yell "Now" and hold my breath. They lower me in. Or they are supposed to.

For some reason, they resumed the lowering thing, then stopped when my elbows hit the water and...they just stopped unexpectedly. I was wondering what was going on. I waited. Finally, when I realized they were not about to continue, I let the air out...and at that very instant, they resumed the lowering and before I could say SHIT...my head and entire body was submerged into the tank.

I clearly remember hanging there, upside down, wondering what the hell I was doing there...my Dad's voice saying, "when are you going to get a real job"...and knowing full well that I would never be able to last without the needed air. Heck, I could barely do it with the deep breathing thing before going in...but here I was getting locked in and realizing I would probably pass out soon. I could just imagine all my friends and audience members watching, and how they would react when I did in fact pass out and have to be rescued. I knew my agent was in the audience, and I remember thinking "I hope he will still book me again"...

Once the curtain is pulled up over the tank (about a minute) I have the opportunity to bend upwards and sneak a bit of air from the gap between the tank cover and the water surface...I did that, but found they had overfilled the tank, so there was no space...

Now I realized why I liked close-up magic so much. No danger of dying.

I did my best to remain calm. Panic eats up too much air. I hung there, and did all I could to free myself, kicking, pushing, struggling, and attempting to not soil the water I was in...

Without going into the secret details (I'd have to kill you all) I managed to get out, but was so dis-oriented that when I jumped down to the stage floor, (now standing in the space between

the tank and the curtain) I reached down, pulled up the curtain and stood (barely) with arms outstretched, waiting for the applause.

However, in my dizzy state, I didn't realize that I was actually at the REAR of the tank, now facing the very surprised orchestra, unseen by the audience. I quickly slipped back under the curtain and wiggled my way to the front of the tank, then reached down and pulled the curtain up to reveal myself to the audience. Huge applause...I was so weak I had a hard time walking, but I somehow did...to the edge of the stage and bowed and drank up the applause and told myself I would never do this stupid trick again!

I had to be taken to the hospital right after my act, as my legs (ankles) looked as if they were broken (they were not) but the audience had no idea I was in trouble.

My favorite part of the show? It was the most money I ever received for a single performance (\$25,000. US) plus \$12,000 in costs and travel...not exactly Lance Burton salary, but for me, it was a milestone!

ADB: You number amongst your friends many movie stars and other celebrities. One of them is Tippi Hendren who, some readers will remember, was the female lead in a few Hitchcock movies ...if I remember correctly I believe it was 'The Birds' and 'Marnie'. A couple of years ago you were involved in putting on some shows to help her animal charity..tell us a little of this story....

I am always available when a charity event for animals is happening, and Tippi has an amazing facility in Northern California called Shambala, where endangered cats are cared for and raised. Naturally, the place is always in need of money to operate, so Tippi arranges these events to raise awareness and funds. Irene Larsen, the wife of the late Bill Larsen, Magic Castle founder (along with his brother Milt), is also a huge animal lover and a great supporter of organizations which cater to animals, so she usually arranges a night at the Magic Castle, with much food and drink donated, and many celebrities in attendance.

Irene always asks me to perform at these functions, and I am always happy to oblige. On this one particular night, after performing at a table for Linda Blair of "The Exorcist" fame, I stepping over to the table where Tippi Hedren was sitting. I performed a series of table tricks, and ended with the production of one of my business cards. I showed it on both sides, (the back is blank) then placed it in Tippi's hand. I asked her for an autograph, and then said, "Thank you, that was fast", and asked her to turn the card over. When she did, her actual autograph was there. She has a very distinctive signature, and always draws little birds all around her signature, sort of a nod to her most famous movie role in "The Birds". She was completely blown away.

You see, a couple of years prior to this event, I was hosting an event at Universal Studios which honored horror movies and the stars from many of them. At the reception afterward, Tippi was one of the many stars in attendance, and I approached her, and asked her for an autograph. I handed her my card, and she signed it. So, here I was, entertaining at one of her parties, and I knew she would not remember me, so I made sure I had that autograph with me at the Castle, hoping I might have the chance to use it in a trick for her. It was a great effect, and quite surprising to her and her guests.

ADB: In the world of magic you and I share many friends in common and they all speak very highly of you regarding your Sponge Ball effect. Personally, I have seen you do that effect many times and yet I never tire of the grace and beauty that you impart to the effect. I guess we can almost say that it is the effect that you are most associated with...fill in the background and tell us how this ended up in your act.

I always loved sleight of hand, from when I was a little brat, first learning magic. The sponge balls fascinated me. A retired magician, Henry Duncklee (a Ringling Brothers magician and sign painter) whom I had met by accident one day, gave me advice: stick with sleight of hand, you can build a career on that, and nobody can ever take it away from you, if you practice diligently. He then showed me a large catalogue, from Tannen's, and pointed out a few tricks that I should get: one was the Benson Bowl, which I promptly ordered, along with the Audrey Walsh Sponge Ball Book.

I spent months with the book and that routine, which came with four squares of sponge. Once I perfected it, I purchased a set of sponge balls and made it a goal to get good with them, and hopefully become the best at sponge ball magic. After almost ten years of constant, daily practice, I finally began to feel I had the expertise to begin showing them off. When I started lessons with Tony Slydini, and later became friends with Frank Garcia, I brought out my sponge balls and they helped me refine my moves and expand upon my repertoire of vanishes. I discovered that they each had their own unique methods of vanishes, and that inspired me to further develop my own original moves. I have been told I have the best vanish in magic, and although I don't believe that, I can say that I have made a career out of those little circles of sponge.

ADB: You are just as well known for The Multiplying Rabbitshow did this come about?

Naturally, I am always looking for ways to improve or enhance my act, and since I first learned how to do sponge moves with a primitive set of sponge bunnies in my first (Mandrake the Magician) magic set, I was eager to develop an original way of presenting what many magicians consider a throw away kids trick.

When I created "Magic Secrets", the very first magic video program for the general public that taught magic, I wanted to have a simple, non-sleight of hand method for people to learn. I remember shooting the instructional portion of that video at The Magic Castle, and when we finished, there was a lull in the activity, and I was sitting there at the table, waiting, and some of the crew members were standing around, waiting to start shooting.

One of them said, "show us that trick again". I knew they all had just seen my explanation of the trick, so I decided to have a bit of fun with them. I repeated the trick for them, but in a different way, using sleight of hand to vanish the bunnies, and then cause them to multiply in their hands, again with a series of moves, rather than the easy method we had just taped. They were, needless to say, dumbfounded.

So, I have always been carrying a set of bunnies around with me, for those special occasions when I might need a quick trick, and over the years, I have developed a way of doing them without the need to go to the pockets for the extra bunnies. And my old friend, the late Irv Weiner used to carve out a nice set of sponge bunnies from foam, and he gave me a set which I still have, although they are now so hard that they are impossible to use.

About four years ago, my friend Steve Goshman brought me the first set of 3-D bunnies that he made, along with the matching large one. I was VERY excited, as I always have felt that the sponge bunnies, done properly are very strong, and especially powerful with adults. The drawback had always been that the little flat sponge bunnies didn't look like much, and so I rarely used them in a professional setting. Suddenly, with the 3D bunnies from Goshman, all of that changes. I developed a new routine using 5 little bunnies and one giant bunny, and worked it into my shows in Vegas for over a year, perfecting it, then writing out the routine, and finally, filming it in front of many audiences, as well as the teaching of it.

When I first lectured at The Magic Circle in London, I brought the bunnies along, and they were an instant hit. For the next two years, I did my first lecture tours, both in the UK and in America, and the bunnies were a prominent part of my lecture. I showed magicians that this could be a solid piece of entertainment for all ages, particularly adults. It is a major part of my act in Vegas, as a matter of fact, I walk into the crowd, with camera following, and do them with 3 different spectators, and it really sets the tone for the rest of the show.

ADB: Over the years you have lectured and held workshops. You were invited twice to lecture at The Magic Circle. Tell us a little about that experience.

A huge honor and thrill for me. I actually lectured 3 times over a period of two years there, once with my "Insider's Workshop", in the Devant Room with only 8 people, which was a lot of fun,

and twice on the stage for the membership. It is hard to believe that they would invite me to begin with, I just do tricks, you know?

I am very lucky, though, in that I had the great opportunity to become friends and study with some of the true masters of the world of magic, namely, Frank Garcia, Tony Slydini, Albert Goshman, Charlie Miller and of course, Dai Vernon. They patiently taught me the methods and techniques and nurtured my skills, and without their kindness and efforts, I would not be the performer that I am today. To be asked to share with the members of The Magic Circle, this same knowledge, is a passing on of the material, if you will.

I remember clearly the excitement of those special nights, and I know that, as silly as it may sound, Vernon and the others were there with me, smiling down on those occasions. They had to be. How else could I have pulled it off? The reception was terrific, and in speaking with many afterward, it felt extremely rewarding to know that many felt they were inspired to do better magic and give more thought to their individual performances. That's really what it is all about.

ADB: Speaking of The Magic Circle, whilst you were in England you did a lecture tour which you affectionately named 'The Fish & Chips Tour'. Share some of your memories with us.....

This was my very first lecture tour, aside from a few sporadic lectures in the States, and I was very excited about it. It began with a lecture in London for The Magic Circle, and then hit 8 or 9 clubs in different cities throughout England and Ireland. It was not very long, as I was under contract to Caesars Palace, and only had 3 weeks off. So Morley Budden arranged as many as he could in a very short period. I drove from one end of the country to the other, London one night, Winchester, Devon, Derby, Manchester, and then off to Dublin. I can't say enough about the hospitality and the positive reception we received along the way, at each and every stop.

When we arrived in Dublin, we were performing on a Friday night, and spent the rest of the weekend with our dear friends Ruairi and Salud O'Connor. After my performance, the rest of the weekend was filled with parades, fireworks and street celebrations. We thought it was in our honor, until Ruairi explained the real reason.

Even though it was May, the weekend was designated as "St. Patrick's Day" celebration, due to the fact that the actual date in March was cancelled due to the mad cow disease scare. We visited as many pubs as possible, in our quest for the perfect pint, spreading magic along the way.

I was really surprised by the number of people who were eager to see my lectures during this quick UK trip, and I vowed to return, which I did the following year. On the strength of the first tour, I was invited back to The Magic Circle, and then on to 30 other magic societies in England, Wales, and again back to Dublin. Jan and I will never forget the trip, and neither will the car rental company, as we completely wrecked a brand new Mercedes (we didn't, the car wash did!) along the way. As I have stated many times before, the greatest part of the trip was the surprise honor of receiving my MIMC with Gold Star onstage at The Magic Circle after my third lecture there.

ADB: Apart from being a professional magician you are also a Drummer. During one of the British tours you ended up in Liverpool at 'The Cavern' . You played drums there...how did all that come about?

When I knew that I was lecturing in nearby Manchester, my agent contacted the Cavern Club in Liverpool to see if they would like to have a magician appear. They were very happy to give it a try. They warned me, however, that the crowds tend to get rowdy, and they did not know how they would receive me. Well, I must say, within a few seconds, the place went completely quiet, and they became totally absorbed with my act. Very enthusiastic response, it was a most enjoyable moment for me, to be on that historic stage.

After the show, while standing at the bar with the manager and the band that was playing, we began to talk about music, and I mentioned that I was a drummer. The band invited me to sit in with them during their next set. THIS was the thrill of a lifetime, let me tell you!

Luckily, Jan captured it all on video, as we were shooting footage all throughout the tour, and at the conclusion of my shows here in Vegas, we play the footage of my drumming in Liverpool as the audience is leaving.

When I returned to Liverpool the following year, I was invited to perform at The Cavern Club again, and this time, invited to actually sign the famous wall on the stage. I am honored to be the only magician who has ever appeared on the Cavern Club stage, and also the only one to be invited to sign the wall. If you ever get to Liverpool, check out the wall – my signature appears just below The Beatles!

ADB: In recent years there has been one person who has been your stalwart companion and support, your lovely wife Jan. It is my pleasure to know Jan and she is a truly wonderful human being. It is obvious to anyone who knows you both that she is an integral part of your Life both professionally and personallyshare with us some of your experiences.

It is true, I could never have achieved all that I have without Jan's assistance in so many areas, both creatively and otherwise. She is my toughest critic, my biggest fan, and my loyal supporter. She is also a great cameraperson, as is evidenced in the two programs we shot while on tour "Fish & Chips Lecture Tour Video" and "The Master Routines"...

Not many people know how we met, or when, but it is a truly magical story, which I will share. I was living in Boston, and on a visit to California, was performing at The Magic Castle, and Jan was in the audience with her soon-to-be husband. After the show, Jan and Joel invited me to join them for a drink, which I did. I was completely mesmerized by her, and when we were sitting at the bar, and Joel was off watching another show, I asked her to marry me instead of her boyfriend. She laughed. She married the other guy. We remained friends, and I even was asked to be the godfather to her son, Brent. Fast forward about 15 years, and I was once again single, and so was Jan. I asked her again, this time she said yes, and we have been together ever since.

ADB: It was a great pleasure for my wife, my son and I to hang with you and Jan for a couple of weeks in Las Vegas in August 2003 when you had just opened at Brendan's at The Orleans Hotel & Casino. It was the first weeks of The Xtreme Close-Up Magic show. Later the show moved from Brendan's to Sazio's next door. Talk us a little about those early months.

When The Orleans Hotel & Casino first contracted us to present the show in their hotel, they suggested Brendan's Irish Pub for the location. I checked the place out, a large, elegant pub with 17 TV screens all around the place, and I figured it would be the perfect place to present close-up magic with a roving camera beaming my hands up onto the many TV screens around the room. What I did not anticipate was the noise level - the place has a very large bar, imbedded in the bar along the back of the room are video poker machines - which means that guests will be playing the machines during my entire act. Also, although the hotel initially told us and advertised the show as a family-friendly affair, on opening night we were told that people under the age of 21 would not be allowed to attend. This meant refunding many tickets every night. It also meant that some folks were disturbed by the noise that continued at the bar during my shows.

After three shows, I immediately knew we were going to be constantly engaged in a battle with the bar patrons, and although I was able to quiet down the place within a few minutes, it was too much trouble. We spoke to the hotel and they offered another location, next door, in the function room of the very popular "Sazio" restaurant. This place was heaven compared to the noisy pub, plus it offered the added element of food.

The show became a dinner show, with a strolling guest magician during the meal, followed by a "special guest" magician from the Vegas area, and a guest magician (usually from The Magic Circle) who went on as the deserts were being served. I would then go on, do about 45 minutes in a quiet, intimate environment. Better, but not perfect. The room was too sterile, so we decorated it with magic posters, magic props and candles, plus added two large video monitors on either side of the stage to handle the video camera feed. It took some work to get the room

rocking, but we were grateful to be there, and while there, we were able to create a lot of word of mouth and generate fabulous press coverage, which led us to a new hotel on the Strip.

We moved into the Flamingo Hotel next, on the Las Vegas Strip, (across from Caesars Palace, where I had worked for nearly six years previously), into a real live theatre called O'Shea's, which held 150 people, with video screens, and perfect acoustics. We did the show there for 3 months, then the hotel gave us notice that they were going to close the showroom and turn it into a bingo hall. Just what Vegas needs, right?

We are now in negotiations with another hotel on the strip, the Imperial Palace (right next to the Flamingo Hilton), which will I be the new location for Xtreme Close-up Magic. We are very excited about this, and anxious to continue the show here in Las Vegas.

ADB: I mentioned earlier that you have many well-know friends but you often refer to one in particular with great respect and affection. I am of course, referring to a living legend of magic, the one and only, the great Carl Ballantine ...tell us about your friendship

Like so many others in the magic world, I was a fan of The Amazing Ballantine since I was a little boy. I enjoyed his performances on the Ed Sullivan Show, and also his great acting work on "McCale's Navy". Back in the mid-eighties, I had the honor of appearing on a show with Carl, at the Tannen's Jubilee where he was the special guest. We met backstage, struck up a conversation, and instantly connected on many levels. We became friends from that weekend, and remain such to this day.

Carl and I go to the race track together a lot, he has taught me many systems for winning, and we spend endless hours laughing, talking about magic, smoking good cigars, and solving all of the world's problems. He is a great cook, and when we are in town, we share many meals together, both at his house, and at ours, where I try to outdo him with my recipes.

He is a constant source of inspiration, he offers advice and comments about my show, he always attends my performances at the Magic Castle, and he has generously given me many priceless bits that are now a part of my act.

A great honor for me was to get Carl into The Magic Circle, and work with him to present a special lecture. Although illness prevented him from accompanying me to London to present this lecture, we did present it at the IBM convention in San Diego a few years ago, and it was easily one of the highlights of the great convention.

Carl is probably the funniest person I know. He is always funny, has a natural sense of humor and knows more jokes than anyone on the planet. Jan and I are blessed to have Carl in our lives. He is part of our family, and we a part of his. I could never fully thank him for all of his support and love. I only hope I have half as much energy and talent when I am his age.

ADB: Since July 2003 you were back in Vegas having fun and starring in 'Xtreme Close-Up Magic' at The Orleans Hotel & Casino but this is not your first time performing in Vegas is it? You were at Caesar's Palace for many years. Share some memories with us of those times....

I first –performed in Las Vegas a long, long time ago, at the now-departed Thunderbird Hotel and Casino, in the lounge, presenting a type of close-up/stage magic that could be described as "Parlour Magic". Shortly after, I opened for Tom Jones at Caesars Palace with a stage act, then over the ensuing years, as an opening act for other celebrities, including Bob Hope, Wayne Newton, Charo, Tony Orlando and many others. It wasn't until Caesars opened Caesars Magical Empire that I got the chance to present close-up magic in Vegas, in a showroom designed specifically for this type of magic.

After 6 years of this, and I can tell you that the Secret Pagoda Showrroom was my absolute favourite place to play in Vegas (with 75 seats, camera assisting the performance and the best audiences anyone could possibly imagine), I was hopeful that the door would finally be open to bring close-up magic the kind of focus and attention it deserved for the general public. I would do five shows a night, five nights a week, for eight weeks at a time.

Then it would be off for a month or two, followed by another eight weeks. I never tired of it. David Copperfield stopped by to see me there, as did many of the local magicians and entertainers.

The weeks flew by, and it took a couple of years, but finally, we were contracted by the Orleans Hotel and Casino to present "Xtreme Close-up Magic" there for six months, and the show was enthusiastically received by the public and the media.

That led to a 3 month contract on the Strip, in the Flamingo Hotel, (O'Shea's Theatre), and more fabulous reviews and critical reception.

I have just presented the show in a new hotel, the Imperial Palace, and I can happily say that "Xtreme Close-up Magic" will soon be opening there (in October), so that visitors to Vegas can continue to enjoy close-up magic along with the other fine examples of traditional stage magic here.

ADB: For anyone who has seen you perform it becomes immediately obvious that you have a deep rooted passion for magic and for performing. You tend to favour a kind of intimate form of Close-Up magic ...tell us how this evolved into the kind of act you are doing today

Ever since I first discovered a love of magic, I was fascinated with the fine art of sleight of hand, and in particular, close-up magic. Milbourne Christopher and others, like Frank Garcia and Tony Slydini, early on, urged me to focus on close-up magic, even though the obstacles to earning a living with this type of magic were huge. They all told me that if I did it well enough, I could earn a huge living with it. And they were right!

I love the reactions I get from working in such a close-up setting, with the audience members close enough to touch the props. It is a great thrill, and every audience adds to that thrill. To be in a position to finally be able to place close-up magic on the map, and make it a permanent part of the Las Vegas scene in most exciting and rewarding, not only for me, but for audience and for future magicians as well.

ADB: There are many magicians around today and they all, to a greater or lesser extent, do tricks moderately well ...but there are those like yourself who also focus on Presentation and Performance. What advice would you give to other magicians about Presentation & Performance.

There is no other element of an act that is more important than these two things. Presentation consists not only of the flawless execution of a sleight or series of moves, but the proper blending of those moves with the personality of the performer.

Unless the whole package is perfect, the act will never reach the heights of success that the real workers attain. It is really more important than the skill level of a person in the execution of a trick or routine.

The personality, the connection with the audience, the likeability factor of the entertainer, these are the components that separate the men from the boys, the amateurs and semi-pro's from the real professionals, the small percentage of those performers who consistently make the big bucks, and exist in the top percentage of entertainers branded as the best of the best.

You must spend as much time, or even more, on the development of a stage persona and the "packaging" of the act components with the personality and method of presentation.

As Bob Hope once told me, "You have 30 seconds for the audience to fall in love with you. If they don't, you will fail, no matter how well you present your talents."

I perfected my onstage persona and presentation over time, and by going on stage without props, as a way of finding my strengths and character elements that would assist me in connecting with my audiences. There is no shortcut to developing these skills. Spend a much

time as possible refining and practicing these skills until you are clear on your stage persona and how to connect with your audience.

ADB: You are now a highly experienced and a seasoned Pro. However, it was not always like that especially when you started out. Knowing what you know today and with the benefit of hindsight what advice would you give to magicians starting out?

One of the most important pieces of advice I received early on was from Tommy Tucker, of Tommy Tucker and Liz fame. When I first was visiting magic clubs and practicing for eight hours a day, wondering how I would become a professional and make a living at this, I asked Tommy what advice he would give me to get me going in the direction of making a career out of magic, he told me, "Take every job possible. Perform at every chance. In every venue. Don't pass up a job, no matter what the pay or circumstance."

I listened, I worked everywhere, in every possible venue, and did so for many, many years. The result is that I got so much experience working in front of real audiences, and that alone was one of the key factors in preparing me for a career in magic. I cannot stress enough, the importance of working in front of paying people, in so many different types of venues. It gives you the all-important experience of thinking on your feet and sensing the reactions and mood of the people you are in front of.

In hindsight, I would also offer the following: Too many performers or would-be performers are impatient, and feel they are ready to make it happen in front of paying people, long before they really are ready. Nothing sinks a career faster than presenting a poorly prepared show, a performance that is not flawless in every sense.

People judge you on each and every show you do. There is no room for error. No excuse for a lack of perfection. A true professional NEVER makes a mistake in front of an audience. NEVER present a show or effect until it is completely perfect. No matter how long it takes. WAIT until you can do everything in you act perfectly, or else you will find yourself in a hole that you will never fully climb out of.

ADB: Thanks Steve it has been a real pleasure hanging out and conversing with you ..and the Martini's are pretty good too!!!

SD: Likewise, Tony. Cheers!

----- ends ---**but my Tribute follows :-**

The Martians Weep

Message from Anthony Darkstone Brook
Tribute to Steve Dacri – The Ultimate Showman

The Martians stand in solemn silence and weep. For those who saw him perform you will know what I mean. For those who don't know, that is how he referred to the Sponge Balls ... he called them Martians.

The Sponge bunnies are not hopping anymore but they are in a warm place. He always, with superb timing told how the bunnies went to a warm place before Multiplying. A handful of bunnies appearing in a spectators hand was just pure Magic and the skill behind it pure genius. You had to see it to appreciate it. He was the Master of all the Sponge routines.

For over 30 years, he was the only Magician to use the Classic Force without fail on lay-people and magicians alike. Many great Cardicians acknowledge his skill. He was truly one the great Magical Entertainers. He truly knew how to charm an audience. My past articles on him testify to his talent. Much of his story is contained within those articles.

We had known each other for many years. He & Jan are close family friends. He was very kind and gave my son Charles his first break in his show at The Orleans in Las Vegas eight years

ago. We worked together on many projects and spent many great times together at his home in Vegas. He made great Martinis!

One time, he was so gracious and allowed my brother (a non-magician) back-stage at The Sahara to watch him set-up. He later gave my brother a private close-up show at his home in Vegas. This was the pre-view of the show at The Hilton. He was a wonderful & generous friend.

I am the Director of International Operations on The Magic Web Channel which he founded
http://www.magicwebchannel.com/index_HOME_noFlash.htm

We also worked together since 2009 on Vegas Inside Tips. After my "Tony Brook In Conversation With ..."articles appeared in parts on Magic New Zealand he featured them in full on Vegas Inside Tips. <http://www.vegasinsidetips.com/TONYBROOK.html>

I am saddened and will miss him greatly.

Shalom RIP.

Respectfully

Anthony Darkstone Brook