



Anthony Darkstone Brook In Conversation With Tom Waldrop

Tom Waldrop is an excellent Magician. He is well versed in our Art, highly skilled and extremely talented. Tom is Secretary for The S.A.M Assembly 59 in Portland, Oregon and is highly praised for his wonderful work in making it an outstanding Assembly. It becomes obvious within moments of meeting Tom that he is a very erudite man with an interesting background coupled with a grand passion for the Art of Magic. An experienced and accomplished Performer, he knows and understands the true Art of magic.

I first met Tom in 2007, when a mutual friend of ours, Michael Roth, then President of S.A.M Assembly 59, introduced us. Michael Produced my 'Illusions of Reality' Show and Tom was my opening act. I was backstage in my dressing room and obviously could not see Tom's act but could hear everything piped thru the speakers. The audience loved him and I remember thinking, "Damn, I gotta follow that". Tom's act was excellent. A true professional in every sense of the word. After my lecture in Portland, Oregon he was kind enough to write some nice words about me. We've remained good friends and he was definitely on my Top 10 list for this series.



ADB: Tom, great to catch up. Been a while. Thanks for taking part in this series.

TW: My pleasure, Tony. Thank you for inviting me.

ADB: You are most welcome, Tom. Let me start by asking you about your role in the SAM Assembly. Apart from your duties as Assembly Secretary, you put together and publish "Flash Paper," the Assembly newsletter ... share some of that with us....

TW: I was elected to the Assembly Secretary position and assumed office in January 2006. I had previously served in other offices including Assembly President for calendar years 2002 and 2003. My tasks as Secretary are fairly common: publish the "Flash Paper" one week before each meeting, prepare minutes after each Assembly and Board meeting, write the monthly report to be published in the M-U-M magazine, maintain the Assembly web site, originate and respond to correspondence on various matters, interface as needed with the S.A.M National officers and National Administrator, and respond to member questions and concerns. The monthly "Flash Paper" typically consists of four pages...the first page provides the agenda for the upcoming meeting as well as information about meeting activities: ShowTime theme, Teach-In topic, StarLight Magic presenters, and other pertinent items. The rest of the newsletter contains general information, magic convention schedules, announcements of upcoming magic lectures, and monthly articles by our Assembly President and Regional Vice President. In addition to all of the writing, I also help recruit and coordinate the folks who provide the Teach-Ins, the presenters for StarLight Magic, and members to compete in one or more of the three contests we hold each year. These are the annual competitions we put on: Will Desmond Close-Up Contest, Stan Kramien Excellence in Stage Magic Contest, and Leo Haglund Most Entertaining Card Trick Contest. The contests always attract members to the meetings. I suppose there are other things I do as Secretary, but this is enough for now. Since I'm retired from the work world, I have plenty of time to devote to these matters.

ADB: You also for many years have been very actively involved with the local SYM group and you teach a class on Saturdays???

TW: That's right, Tony, my involvement with the SYM began four years ago. Our Portland SYM Assembly was chartered in 1995 and has produced several top-notch magicians over the years. This group meets for 90 minutes on the first and third Saturdays of each month. At least half of each meeting is devoted to magic instruction. A little over a year ago, I felt that Oregon's capital city—Salem—could support an Assembly of its own. One of the favorite fun places for kids in Salem is the A.C. Gilbert Discovery Village. Mr. Gilbert was born in Salem and is the father of the Erector Set, Mysto Magic Sets, the American Flyer trains, and many other toys that were popular in the first half of the last century.

I worked with the A.C. Gilbert staff to get permission to meet at no cost on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month. I was also able to enlist several other S.A.M. members to qualify as Certified Leaders. We held our first meeting in February 2009, received our official Charter in July, and we have grown to 11 members to date. I prepare a newsletter twice a month for each group and help coordinate the few outside shows we do each year. Since I serve as Senior Mentor for both SYM groups, that pretty well takes care of my Saturday mornings. Most important, it gives me a chance to pay back...I was a member of a young magician club in my early teen years.

ADB: You also are quite busy each year with the 59 annual banquet; give us some insight into that...

TW: Ah yes, the banquets. A lot of work but also a lot of fun. My personal involvement is fairly straight forward since we have a committee to handle the details. This event usually takes place in mid-January. The banquet serves as the activity where we introduce the new officers for the year, present our annual awards, and conduct our Stage Magic Contest. I usually send out the flyers to advertise the event and make up the name badges for folks to wear at the party. I shouldn't say "of course," but of course I compete in the contest each year. Magic is a performing art and I take every opportunity that comes along to perform. Even better, I actually won the First Place Trophy in 2005.

ADB: You have had well over 50 years of experience in matters related to the art of magic: learning, performing, teaching, and administering. Share some of that time-span with us

TW: Yes Tony, that's right, I started when I was 5. Just kidding, but when you put it like that it seems a long time but to me it just seems a couple of years. I actually waved my first magic wand when I was 10, helped start a youth magic club in Portland when I was 12, and was allowed to join the Portland Society of Magicians (PSM) when I was 14. The PSM was the only adult magic club in town at the time. Because of my "other" jobs, I am fairly well experienced in multiple disciplines that include Human Resources, Training, and Project Management. My college major was broadcasting and this gave rise to taking many courses in acting, speaking, script writing, stagecraft, journalism, and other related skills. Without any doubt these skills have helped me personally to continually become a better magician. They have also helped me in various other magic related areas including administration, organization, and planning. Useful things to have within reach when I often get involved with everything from Banquets to our Saturday sessions for Young Magicians.

ADB: That's exactly what I meant when I referred to you as highly experienced. You have had a lot of experience teaching at magic camps and workshops. You also develop magic curriculum and assist in coordinating public shows performed by the Young Magicians who span ages 7 through 17. Elaborate for us your involvement

TW: Regarding the magic camps and workshops, that's where my relationship with the A.C. Gilbert organization got started. In 2007, I was hired to teach two 5-day Magic Camps at the Village. I did a 2-hour class each morning for the 6-8 year olds and a 3-hour class in the afternoon for the 9-12 year olds. At the end of each camp, the kids put on a 30-minute show for their family members and friends. I taught similar camps the following two years and am booked to do another one this July. I have also taught several one-day workshops over the same period. A little over a year ago I was contracted by an athletic club in Portland to teach magic to members' kids.

ADB: I heard that you are something of a collector in regards to your teaching of magic and that you have a vast store of material...

TW: Well, Tony, I don't know if I'd call myself a collector. I currently have a personal magic library of close to 1,000 books, pamphlets, CDs, DVDs, VHS Videos, and other resources to continue building my personal performance material. Of course, the material is at my fingertips for putting together curricula to teach at SYM meetings and the other educational opportunities I'm engaged in. So, my collection doesn't just sit on a shelf and look pretty. I actually refer to the library as I just outlined.

ADB: Tell us a little more about this teaching

TW: Basically, it all began when my involvement with SYM intensified. I wanted to do more than just show the kids an effect and tell them the secret. I also want to show them how to perform the effect. I wanted them to go home with a couple of trials under their belts, the props they need to perform the effect, and written instructions they can refer to later. I have developed almost 150 of these special instruction sheets and add to this collection on a monthly basis. At each of our SYM meetings, we try to present two or three new effects to the kids. The theme for each meeting will be different. For example, over the past few meetings, we taught magic with paper money, the next meeting was magic with balls, the next meeting was magic with rings, and this was followed two weeks later by magic with rubber bands. Of course, we work other topics into the fray such as presentation skills as we go along.

My theory is that if a young person comes to a 90-minute magic club meeting and doesn't go home with at least one new piece of magic, the kid won't return for another meeting.

ADB: Digressing a moment...you were a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Air Force. The Air Force was your life for some 22 years ...tell us a bit about those days ... or should I say decades

TW: Sure Tony, be happy to... I earned my officer commission through the Air Force ROTC program while going to college. My career area was in operations. I was trained to use radar

and communications equipment to control an American fighter plane to a position where it could shoot down a “bad guy.”

As my personal skills developed in this task, I eventually worked into positions where a large part of my time in the Air Force was spent in developing training programs and teaching others to successfully perform the combat mission. They always tell you to never volunteer for anything in the military. I was born with a flaw and usually put my hand up whenever new and unusual opportunities presented themselves. Some of these opportunities came in the guise of human resource-related assignments. These skills were a great help to me later when I returned to civilian life.

During my 22 years of active duty, seven of those years were served in the Far East: Japan, Thailand, and Taiwan. I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the USAF and the chance I had to see a lot of the world and learn some very unique skills. While I found many opportunities to perform magic during that career, I had limited chances to belong to magic clubs or take part in conventions and other related activities.

ADB: You have a Masters Degree and also other degrees including Japanese which, I’m told, you are fluent ...what’s the story on that?

TW: Well, Tony, actually I just have my Bachelor’s Degree in Broadcasting from the University of Oregon and my Master’s Degree in Human Resource Management from Central Michigan University. I was stationed in Japan for four years and the University of Maryland offered an overseas program for folks in the military. I completed 12 hours of Japanese language training—read, write, and speak—because I worked with my Japanese Air Force counterparts every day. Likewise, they learned English from one source or another. It just made our daily connections a lot easier.

ADB: I mentioned in my introduction that you are the Secretary of Assembly 59 of The Society of American Magicians. Obviously, you are a Member of The SAM, but you also belong to the IBM, the IMS, the Portland Society of Magicians.....do you attend all of the meetings and get involved with all the Clubs?

TW: Well...Tony, I try. There is no IBM Ring close to Portland so I have no meetings to attend. I don’t believe the IMS has a Chapter structure. I do attend the PSM meetings every month and participate in the activities.

However, I don’t hold an office in the PSM. Therefore, as you mentioned, my main focal points right now are my duties as Assembly 59 Secretary and as an SYM Mentor. I have been able to attend several SAM conventions while I was serving as Northwest Regional Vice President as well as those put on by the Pacific Coast Association of Magicians (PCAM). I felt very privileged in being able to attend the joint IBM/SAM Louisville Convention in 2008.

Our Assembly 59 is the largest (70+ members) in the eight states that make up the SAM Northwest Region. Our Region (which includes Alaska) occupies the largest land area of the United States but has the smallest population to draw from. Since Seattle is reasonably close, we maintain contact with several magicians from there and attend each other’s functions when we can.

Long-time SAM 59 member Stan Kramien has been hosting the Northwest Magic Jamboree just outside of Portland for the past two decades. The 22nd edition was held April 30 to May 1 and had about 225 folks attend the event. Lots of folks came from Canada. Major dealers from all over the U.S. attended. The big show on Saturday night featured Mike Caveney, Tina Lenert, Christopher Hart, and Dana Daniels. This was no small gig.

Last year was the inaugural Portland Magic Jam, a 2½-day magic blitz. The featured visiting artists included David Regal, Nathan Kranzo, Aaron Fisher, and Steve Dobson. This year’s Jam is set for September 24-26 and will feature Daryl, Doc Eason, Whit “Pop” Haydn, and Wayne Houchin. In Portland, our Assembly 59 and the PSM frequently join hands to sponsor some of

the excellent lectures that become available. So far this year we have been visited by John Lovick and Troy Hooser. Joshua Jay visited Portland on July 20.

ADB: All great performers. Over the years, I've been fortunate to have seen many of them perform. In 2008, at the TAOM, I was on the bill with Dana Daniels ...he was just amazing!!! David Regal is always exceptionally brilliant! Speaking of folks that we know, Mark Weidhaas, whom you know well, was inaugurated S.A.M. President at the 2010 Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. He belongs to several organizations and he was telling me that it serves to broaden his thinking and perspective. Do you feel the same way ?

TW: Yes. I think that expanding one's thought processes and interacting not only with other Magicians but with more than one Magic organization does help elevate the Art. Yes. I for one am delighted that Mark will be the next S.A.M. President. He was, as you know, for many years the Colorado Deputy before he replaced me as Northwest Regional Vice President. I had many opportunities to work with him on S.A.M. matters and helped encourage his election as Second Vice President.

ADB: Speaking of State Deputies. Our very good mutual friend, Michael Roth, has been serving as Oregon Deputy for a while. He is now the Northwest Regional Vice President. Michael, as you and I both know, has remarkable organizational skills and I think together you both will do great things for The S.A.M. up in Oregon and the Northwest. I hear that there is some serious "campaigning" for an S.A.M. Convention to be held in Oregon. ... I hear that when the S.A.M. National Council met in Portland last November, the omens are looking good for a S.A.M. Convention there

TW: Well yes, Tony. I cannot say much but from what I hear, it sure does seem like a very real possibility and I would be, as indeed all our other Assembly 59 members, truly delighted if that came to pass during the next few years. Our city certainly has the facilities to host such an event. The main issue will be our location in relation to where most S.A.M. members live. Since most conventions are held east of the Mississippi River, we have to deal with this issue all the time.

With travel expenses continuing to rise, we need to keep evaluating the high cost of round trip fares to attend one of our National Conventions. The St. Louis convention split the difference—distance-wise—between the east and west coasts. The Boston, Louisville, Buffalo, and Atlanta sites certainly play against those of us on the West Coast.

Well, Tony, as an International Deputy and SAM Envoy, you have sight of the Council minutes after each meeting before they are published in M-U-M and I'm sure you would know about convention sites well in advance.

Of course, it would be great to read that we in Portland were chosen as a future location for a SAM Convention. It would also be great to have you back in Portland.

ADB: Thank you, Tom. I'd love to go back. I have very fond memories of my time there; your Assembly and the PSM treated me kindly. You all were very welcoming and friendly. Let me move along to a topic that you and I love dearly...and that is the Presentation of Magic. In other words, not just the trick but performing the effect ...you have a booklet on that topic ...share some of your thinking on that

TW: Ah yes! The presentation of magic...I know it is your pet hobby horse too. But you are so right. It is not the effect but the presentation. I think that many Magicians forget that we are in the Entertainment and Mystery business and not in the "Gosh, I fooled you" business. My little booklet was just a collection of my thoughts on this topic. The items were originally written as monthly newsletter bits when I was serving as Assembly President ("The Prez Sez") and as Northwest RVP ("Veep's Views").

I believe that most of the recent additions to my library have been works dealing with this aspect of the magic craft. I have some excellent writings from Juan Tamariz, David Stone, Darwin Ortiz, Jay Sankey, Ken Weber, and others.

From Ortiz I quoted, "Audiences don't like to work." The main lesson here is the "KISS" principle: Keep It Simple, Sorcerer." With this idea, I try to perform effects that take less than three minutes, use props that are recognizable, and tie it all together with a believable story. I avoid using the word "trick" when I perform. Nobody likes to be tricked. Some of them don't mind being fooled. All of them love to be amazed. As Weber says, "The trick is important but the performance trumps the trick every time.". Tony, I can ramble on forever on this subject...

ADB: It is indeed a subject that merits time and serious discussion. Hopefully, many more Magicians will come to understand its importance after reading your words. Thank you for taking the time to converse.

TW: My pleasure Tony. I've really enjoyed the conversation and hope we can do it again sometime. I trust that you'll have a wonderful year and perhaps we'll get together sometime soon.

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