

A Night of Rope Magic (September 2016 Meeting)

Posted on [September 30, 2016](#) by [Dennis Phillips](#)

Vice President Craig Fennesey conducted the Ring meeting. President Craig Schwarz was grieving the death of his father and we extend our sympathies to Craig. 32 people were in attendance with two guests, Lorne and Logan Galloway. Yul Largetto also joined the Ring. We were happy to see the family of the late James Sherrill visit with us. His sister Karen and her family were present. James was a fixture in Central Florida Magic for many years performing on cruise ships and at Sea World as “Honest James” and his signature was a devastating Three Card Monte and the line “Honest James wouldn’t cheat ya!”. Dan Stapleton filled us in on next May’s “Magicpalooza” Close-up convention. He also showed a unique painting of the classic poster of Kellar passing the mantle of magic to Thurston. Bev Bergeron repeated Terri Rogers “Stargate”, the topological oddity.

Phil Schwartz presented Magic History Moment #79, a look at Dell O’Dell, the Queen of Magic. Dell was born in 1902 and lived 59 years but has left an enduring mark on magic. Phil explained that she was a smart business woman and was able to generate booking with her giveaways, souvenirs, photos and remarkably large assortment of promotional material. She has a comedy approach and delivered her patter with jokes and gags and usually in rhyme. Dell was the first woman member of many male only magic groups. She shifted from being based in New York to Los Angeles where she bought an Abbott’s Magic store in Hollywood and later befriended people such as our own Bev Bergeron.

The show opened with Bev and Phil doing a comedy cut and restored rope. The theme was “Rope Magic”. Bev reprieved his hilarious Diamond Horseshoe classic, “spitting out teeth”, after he was “accidentally” hit in the mouth by straight man Phil. Dennis Phillips followed with the Bill Neff Miracle Rope trick. Mark Fitzgerald did Flash Cash and an excellent card in envelope at any number called. Roger Reid put two ropes in a paper sack and they came out “Tide”. It got a big laugh. Jimmy Ichihana is always amazing. Random numbers were called out and he would flick over cards and the number of cards always matched the numbers exactly! Ravelli closed out the show with a number of expert rope penetrations, knot vanishes and ring and cord effects.

Dennis Phillips

Dennis Deliberations ... Ring # 170

“The Bev Bergeron Ring”

October 2016

“A Walsh Cane should come lubricated with Polysporin® and accompanied by a large box of Band-Aids®” -advice to me from Duke Stern 1970-

Some props come with a reputation. This was from the days when Russ Walsh made his metal canes from the same spring steel that Gillette used for their razor blades. Walsh simply had the steel tempered and blued. Fred Culpitt, the English magician was better known for inventing the Doll House Illusion but he was also known for his vanish cane. His secret was to drill a hole in the stage and vanish the can by ditching it through the

hole. Magicians would play a music hall and knew that Culpitt had played there because they found a plugged hole downstage, center right. Fantasio changed the dynamics of the vanishing cane with his plastic canes and candles. He said that he got the idea from seeing the tempered plastic that would roll out to form shelving for stacking soft drink bottles in grocery stores.

I always lacked money when I was a kid so the \$12.50 for a metal Vanishing Walsh Cane was too much, so I made my own out of glossy black gift wrap paper. I had to make a new cane each time but I made it like the P&L Vanishing Wand; a simple paper shell.

But think! Who uses a dress cane today? They were ubiquitous. 100 years ago.

At the last ring meeting I presented The Bill Neff Rope Miracle. It was taught to me by Charles Windley, who along with Roy Huston were two of Neff's last assistants in the early 1960s. I did improve it with a weighted "hold out" to greatly ease getting access to the device needed to do it.

I also explained Doug Henning's unique adaptation and you can see him doing the Neff Miracle Rope beginning at 6:03 on this You Tube Clip.

<https://www.facebook.com/willy.cheyenne/videos/1695038044042765/> Yes... That is Bruce Jenner on the clip in his pre- gender transformation!

"Point, Counterpoint"

(More insight into discussions that I have with my old Canadian magic friend, Larry Thornton)

...In which I address a randomly selected list of ten quotations online about MAGIC and MAGICIANS, that have, until now, totally escaped a full examination as to their possible "truthiness". —Or not.

"Truthiness" is a quality characterizing a "truth" that a person making an argument or assertion claims to know intuitively "from the gut" or because it "feels right" without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination, or facts. American television comedian Stephen Colbert coined the word, as the subject of a segment called "The Word" during the pilot episode of his political satire program *The Colbert Report* on October 17, 2005. — from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truthiness> . On the other hand, it might be equally reasonable to assert that what I'm *actually* tackling are "deepities". A "Deepity" is a term employed by philosopher Daniel Dennett in his 2009 speech to the American Atheists Institution conference, coined by the teenage daughter of one of his friends. The term refers to a statement that is apparently profound but actually asserts a triviality on one level and something meaningless on another. Generally, a deepity has (at least) two meanings: one that is

true but trivial, and another that sounds profound, but is essentially false or meaningless and would be “earth shattering” if true. To the extent that it is true, it doesn’t matter. To the extent that it matters, it isn’t true. —

from <http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Deepity> .

1. The magic of drama is infinitely more powerful than the magic of trickery. It is as available to the conjurer as it is to the actor. The only difference is that actors take it for granted, whereas few conjurers are even aware that it exists. —HENNING NELMS, *Magic and Showmanship*

Counterpoint: The power of drama for conjuring is over-rated. When David Copperfield first wove melodramatic tales around his illusions in his early TV Specials, some viewers (in particular, other magicians) derided his efforts as being overly sentimental. Drama and “magic” go well together in the movies where advanced computer generated imagery (CGI) creates fantastic visions of pure fantasy. Movie audiences accept this form of “magic” only for what it is: stunning eye-candy that requires only enough suspension of belief to make the story work. But people go to a live magic show to be astonished by effects that leave no room for explanation, and an added ‘decoration’ of a story line with professional actors playing principal parts would add little to the over-all mystery. If drama lent itself so powerfully to conjuring, throughout the past 150-or-so years we would have witnessed far more professional stage magicians immersing their illusions in dramatic plays, or at the very least, short dramatic vignettes in the style of Copperfield. Granted, it could be argued that the Doug Henning Broadway production of *The Magic Show* was a notable exception, but in this instance people went to enjoy an evening of *musical theater* over a straight magic presentation.

2. It is human nature to want to believe in the wizardry of the magician—but also to turn against him and to scorn him the moment that he commits the slightest error that reveals his trickery. Those in the audience are embarrassed to have been so easily astonished, and they blame the performer for their gullibility. — DEAN KOONTZ, *Odd Thomas*

Counterpoint: As Penn Jillette likes to tell us, no modern intelligent audience today actually believes he and Teller are in any way risking their lives when they do their Bullet Catch. Likewise, it is not “human nature” for any reasonable person today to be going to magic shows expecting, or even hoping, that the entertainer will exhibit actual super powers. And if the magician should commit an error such that some methodology is accidentally exposed, rather than “scorn him or feel embarrassed to have been so easily astonished” (as Dean Koontz alleges), audiences today would likely be amused without experiencing any accompanying feelings of embarrassment or gullibility.

3. We do not need magic to change the world. We carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better. — J. K. ROWLING, speech to Harvard Alumni Association, 2008

Counterpoint: The power to simply “imagine better” would mean nothing without the will and ability to **act** on such imaginings. Countless millions of people have the power to imagine a better world under almost every kind of negative circumstance; but few of them are in a position to be able to affect changes for the better.

4. I had loved magic tricks from the time I was six or seven. I bought books on magic. I did magic acts for my parents and their friends. I was aiming for show business from

early days, and magic was the poor man's way of getting in: you buy a trick for \$2, and you've got an act. — STEVE MARTIN, *Time Magazine*, Aug. 24, 1987

Counterpoint: While it is true that several show business celebrities started in magic and/or kept magic as a sideline (Orson Welles, Johnny Carson, Woody Allen, Dick Cavett, etc. See the lengthy list at: <http://www.magictricks.com/celebrity-magicians.html>) it does not follow that magic is the easiest starting point through which to launch a career in the entertainment business. The stereotypical impressions some people like to give magic, such as, “*Tricks are for kids!*”; “*You too, can do magic!*”; “*I was into magic as youngster, but I outgrew it,*” (*we've all heard that one*) and “*You buy a trick for \$2 you've got an act*” —falls hard upon the shoulders of professional magicians who, over decades, forged themselves in the fires of serious study and hard work: mastering difficult sleight of hand, learning the tools of the trade, developing showmanship skills, and for many, developing solid marketing skills in the face of overwhelming odds of failure.

5. True magic is the art and science of changing states of mind at will. — DOUGLAS MONROE, *The 21 Lessons of Merlyn*

Counterpoint: Irrespective of the fact that “true magic” does not exist (except in the addled minds of some ‘New Agers’ and assorted miracle-mongers and romantic fantasists), “changing states of mind” is not what conjuring is all about. Rather, it is about the psychological manipulation of human perception and cognition by taking advantage of a lifetime of preconditioning. It is often said that the magic is in the eye of the beholder. As TELLER tells us, “*When a magician lets the viewer notice something ON HIS OR HER OWN, that's when the lie becomes impenetrable.*”

6. Magic exists. Who can doubt it, when there are rainbows and wildflowers, the music of the wind and the silence of the stars? Anyone who has loved has been touched by magic. It is such a simple and such an extraordinary part of the lives we live.
— NORA ROBERTS, *Charmed*

Counterpoint: Poetically expressed emotional responses to phenomena that induce feelings of beauty and awe can be called “magic”, but only in a subjective sense. If I were to contend that actual outward magic exists, the examples I would cite would be physical phenomena that science has not yet been able to explain: the origin of life, human consciousness, quantum mechanics, dark energy and dark matter, black hole singularities, and [to Quote Arthur C. Clarke] “*any technologies that are sufficiently advanced as to be inextinguishable from magic.*” — As long as there are impenetrable mysteries in this universe, there will be magic.

7. Magic is not about having a puzzle to solve. It's about creating a moment of awe and astonishment. And that can be a beautiful thing. — DAVID BLAINE

Point: Right on! I say this even though I am not a big fan of Blaine's performing style.

8. David Blaine, I think, was the first TV magician to really turn the camera around and make it about the spectator's experience. That's really what magic is all about. —
MICHAEL CARBONARO

(Michael Carbonaro is an Italian-American actor, magician, and improv artist. He is known for his hidden-camera segments, in which he tricks unsuspecting customers at a convenience store.)

Counterpoint: At the time of David Blaine's first TV Special, there were magic fans who believed quite a bit of editing was involved. It wasn't so much the actual magic that

was edited, as a gut-feeling among the cognoscenti of the art that each effect was performed multiple times, so that only the wildest, most evocative, most over-the-top reactions would be in the final cut. The problem with pre-recorded magic is that it is impossible for the home viewer to know exactly what is going on. Movie and video cameras lend themselves to editing, restricted angles of view, and an artificial control over the sense of time. Any or all of these factors combined can undermine the very premise that magic is predicated on: *The spontaneous live experience of astonishment.*

9. When I was in college, being a magician was not the classiest thing to be. It was like being a folk singer before Bob Dylan. — DOUG HENNING

Counterpoint: It doesn't follow of course, that Copperfield, Blaine, or any other highly successful magician working today would be "classy enough" to turn this situation around. The public's long-held prejudice that "*magic is for kids*" still stands. The magician still ranks "down there" in the public's perception along with jugglers, mimes, ventriloquists, and even clowns. ...I am reminded of one of the "classier" professional magicians I met who, in a candid moment when we were alone together, proudly showed me his beautifully designed glossy, multi-colored, four-page brochure. He said to me, "Look it over carefully, and tell me if you can find any mention that I am a *magician.*" The brochure emphasized his multiple talents as M.C., standup comic, inspirational speaker, and more — but *nowhere* was there any mention of him being a magician, or even doing magic. "*And yet,*" he said with a smile, "*whenever I'm hired for any of these positions, I do magic! And audiences still love what I do.*"

10. When you're learning how to do magic, the first rule is "never reveal a secret". In a way, by telling someone I'm a magician, it kind of gives away the best secret of all. How interesting it would be, to take the magician out of the equation of a magic show. — MICHAEL CARBONARO

Counterpoint: Take the magician out of the equation? Yes, it's an interesting premise —for the first person who thinks of the idea. But if more magicians distanced themselves from who they actually are, it could possibly open the door to more opportunists like Uri Geller, who preferred to be thought of as a genuine psychic rather than a "just" a magician. ...On the other hand, like my friend with the fancy brochure, *it just might land them more work....*

Dennis

Rules for Magicians

Posted on [September 29, 2016](#) by [Dennis Phillips](#)

Here are some basic rules that Magicians should keep in mind.

(Excuse my wry humor)

