

## Tom Frank Lectures at April 2017 Meeting

Posted on [April 29, 2017](#) by [Dennis Phillips](#)

### Ring Report Ring #170 “The Bev Bergeron Ring” SAM Assembly #99 April 2017 Meeting

President Craig Schwarz gavelled the meeting to order with over 30 present. The entire meeting was devoted to the Tom Frank Lecture. Tom Frank is the one of the least talked about, but most respected street magician with those who know. He was a student of Cellini . For over 30 years he has been performing and is a favorite at the Magic Castle in California. Tom presented his revered the Cups and Balls and a poetic version of the Linking Rings. It has been said that classics are classics for a reason. Tom’s presentation and personal touches of the masters like Dai Vernon and the late Daryl kept these classics alive. Tom’s passion was clear. He offered his presentation of the Stripper Deck and then explained how he pitched them for sale on the streets for many years. He has some great coin manipulations and a rare five coin star. Another one of his innovations was a signed card in a wallet that was continuously seen by the spectator. He even had a great tip on a using a powerful Blue Tooth speaker with music for his street act. Tom is on a limited lecture tour and we were thrilled to be a part of his route.

Dennis Phillips



Tom Frank with his Linking Rings done in poetry!

**Dennis Deliberations ... Ring # 170**  
**“The Bev Bergeron Ring”**

**May 2017**



*When a man is wrapped up in himself, he makes a pretty small package.*

(John Ruskin, 1819 – 1900)

I have known a number of strange failed magicians in my five decades of being around this art. Each story is very sad. Each is the story of lost dreams of making it to the “big time” in magic. This month I will feature two from the 70s and early 80s. Perhaps these examples will explain why my wife, Cindy, is not too warm to all of the people I know who are into magic. We have had sad and tragic encounters with magicians during our 45 years of marriage.

His stage name was his last name, Booker, spelled backwards (“Rekoob”). He called himself “Rekoob the Magnificent”.

Booker was a locksmith in the Southern town where I was employed on local TV in the early 70s. He was one of the best locksmiths in the business with 15 employees, a fleet of step-vans and contracts with all the major businesses, but he had a passion for magic and illusions. His locksmith business provided him with a fabulous income. But the drive to be a touring magician drove him crazy. He sold his profitable business to go into magic “fulltime”. He spent many thousands of dollars trying to get into magic fulltime.

Sadly he was a real Redneck...Horrible Southern twang in his language, high raspy voice, zero originality. He was as they said about the Hapsburg Dynasty in Europe in the late 1800s, “He never learned anything and he never forgot anything!”

Hi major talent was that he could sling the bull to a client and buyer when he was selling a show (“people pass out when I do my Cremation!”) He bugged the Devil out of me, when I lived in his town, wanting to be on my local TV show and have me promote him over the air.

He divorced his first wife. Although she got a sizable portion of the proceeds from his locksmith business, it was probably a good move if he wanted a stage assistant. She looked like Rosanne Barr on a bad hair-day.

He married some really young bone-thin woman. Mack was late 40s; she was in her late 20s. They had 2 kids in a row. She had no figure (But what nature had forgotten, they stuffed with cotton) and an overbite that would have been an orthodontist’s challenge and joy to fix. She looked like something someone had just dragged out of the Carolina backwoods.

Booker did a few fairs (much like Harry Albacker) and finally ended up losing everything he had in life except his ancient Concord Motor home and a small utility trailer with magic props.

He traveled with his wife and 2 young kids doing Polaroid photos and a little magic (“Your picture with the bunny!). They mostly appeared in the old JM Fields discount stores and K-Marts. The stores just gave him a small space near the entrance and whatever he could clear from the photos was his income. Sometimes 4 photos sold was a good day.

Anyway... he traced me down to Orlando after I moved there in the fall of 1975 (drat you Phil Morris for telling him!)

In December of 1975 he parked his motor home in front of the house I rented on Harmon Avenue in Winter Park. It backed right up to Interstate-4. Car noise was horrible! Vaarrrroom! It was solid 24 hours a day, but it only cost us \$250 a month to rent back then.

He and his wife and kids sort of moved onto our lot. Most of the days they would drive over to the old JM Fields at the corner of Lee Road and 17-92 to do magic and photos. The pickings were slim because Orlando was in a housing collapse and local depression in 1975 following the initial Disney build-out and the gas shortages. In the evening they were back in front of my house, with their motor home, for the night.

To this day, Cindy detests “Dinty Moore” stew because at night they would eat with us and every other night we all had stew and rice. I think a few times we had Hamburger Helper with precious little hamburger and lots of off-brand cheese macaroni. (Cindy bought all of this, of course) After a week of running an extension cord and water hose to the motor home, his dump tank filled and he could never figure out a way to tap into

my home sewer clean-out plug so he moved on to a campground in Wachulla. He tried dumping a couple of times into my sewer connection, leaving a pool of human feces in my front yard.

Evening conversations were filled with a half pack of Camels and grandiose dreams of big illusion shows and going to Broadway. Promptly at 9PM the Corby's Whiskey came out. All the frustration would then be liberated and the pent up anger and rage would spill over into an hour tirade about how the world had screwed him and what a great illusionist he was. I vividly recall him sucking on a cigarette that he had stuck in the gap of a front missing tooth. He could smoke almost an entire cigarette with no hands. His props were mostly Abbott's illusions that he had he picked up from other dreamers whose dreams had faded away into disillusionment.

Mack died a few years later...Phil said it was heart trouble. It may have been. My guess would be that years of drinking had also corroded away his liver and his lungs were worn out from chain smoking. He ended up leaving his Abbott's Cremation in my driveway because the utility trailer he was towing had sprung a leak and it was ruining his props.

That Cremation was the only prop left where the plywood had not warped. It was the same Cremation Illusion that I used in the 1976 Lake Eola Halloween Show that Dan Stapleton produced!

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A few months later in early 1976 a young, thin, clean-cut preacher's-kid, JD, whose father could be described as a rabid, snot-slinging, pulpit pounding , preacher in Kissimmee ,stopped into the shop. At first, JD vaguely reminded me of a short-haired preppy version of Doug Henning. JD was very talented and a creative thinker.

JD was into Gospel magic and his Gospel applications ( message) with the tricks were very good. He worshipped Andre Kole, the traveling Gospel Illusionist, who has traveled for many years for Campus Crusade for Christ.

JD dreamed of being a Gospel magician-illusionist.

He left shortly after that to go to a Bible College in Kentucky to major in ministry. He got through college but near the end he fell into booze, even though drinking was absolutely forbidden by any of the students. He told me that he had never tasted alcohol in any form until he was away at the Bible School and his senior year. He was off campus and sneaked a drink just to see what it was like. He said he was addicted after one drink. He had finally found something that made him feel good and secure and silenced all the chattering monkeys in his head. I often wonder if he just transferred his religious

addiction into a chemical addiction based on alcohol and sex. Insecure people need something to make them feel secure.

After he graduated, with a degree in Christian Ministry and an internship as a Youth pastor, he could not make enough money to live and was struggling to stay off the sauce, so he soon ended up working as an emcee in topless bars in Northern Kentucky. He returned to Orlando and once in a drunken stupor, he told me that he had a “ministry:” to the people who worked in bars. His rationalization was that “Jesus made wine” and they accused Jesus of being a drunkard and Jesus was also friends with prostitutes!” He followed up each statement by rattling off a list of Bible verses to prove his point. His pious family disowned him for being a sinner, but he stayed in Orlando and worked in my costume shop for a few months at Halloween before going to work as a DJ/Announcer at one of the old South Orange Blossom Trail Topless Dancer Clubs.

Since his church insisted he “get rid of his sins” before they would help him, he had no close connection to any religious group. He thought that all other Christian denominations were evil and apostate except his, but his would not have him! I tried to get him into AA and for a month or two he attended their meetings. I was the only religious church-going friend that he had. Being from a his rigid denominational background, he could never accept my mainstream Christian approach as being valid. In fact, he used to call me a “sinner” for even associating with him! I remember him being stinking drunk-as-a-skunk and still trying to convert me over to his denomination.

He booked a few Gospel magic shows in distant churches, with preachers who did not know him well, and kept his dream alive that he would be a big-named Gospel illusionist one day. I hired him and his girlfriend (a biker chick turned topless dancer) a few times on some of my magic road-tours. She frequently confided her own demons to my wife Cindy.

The Flying Carpet Illusion that I own today was a gift from him for picking him up from jail after a DUI arrest.

He permanently lost his driver’s license after a couple more DUIs. He was forced to use the public bus system. He married his biker chick girlfriend when she told him that she was pregnant. Her ex-husband came by and beat the tar out of him when he found out that his ex-wife was expecting. She divorced JD shortly after the baby was born. He emotionally went downhill and died of acute alcohol poisoning at far too young an age...

A short time later, I pulled up into my driveway at my house in Audubon Park and found pieces of old illusions were littering my carport. I knew whose they were but I had no idea how they got there.

His widow had gone back to her ex-husband and they both wanted to get rid of all the memories of JD but for some reason they did not just trash his props so they loaded them all in the back of his mud truck and dumped them in my carport! Maybe it was her

final statement to me; maybe it was a gesture of thanks to my wife Cindy and me for helping them, or maybe she just wanted Cindy's attention. She did call up Cindy a short time later to explain that her baby was not JD's but her ex-husband's. She provided explicit details as why that was the fact. She told Cindy that she wanted to set the record straight with the only real friends that JD had who were left on earth. I walked into the kitchen just as that phone call was ending. Cindy turned, clutched me and buried her face in my chest and sobbed like a baby.

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I am sorry to convey some sad stories of entertainers who I have known. Show business is tough.

I need to conclude on an "up" note:

Many magicians underestimate the Indian Sword Basket. It is said to be one of the oldest illusions and was ubiquitous in India. Along with the Indian Rope trick is almost approaches magic mythological status. The plot is simple. Boy goes into large wicker basket, several swords are shoved through and removed and then the magician steps into the basket filling it. The boy apparently has vanished. The magician steps out and the boy emerges from the basket unharmed. It is ideally a "street trick" where the audience can see there are no traps under it. My stage version sits on a low platform so the audience can see underneath. I have mostly used it as part of a pirate scene in my illusion show.

Several other good versions and more involved routines that I have seen. Lee Germain & Judi did a comedy version that began with him stepping in the basket and looking lonely so he stepped out and put a blow-up doll wearing a Genii costume inside. The inserted swords deflated it. He looked dejected at holding a now limp doll, so he put in back inside and put the hose of a tire pump in the top hole and pumped the handle to the beat of the music and out came Judi all inflated in the same Genii costume. The bit was not as Freudian it could be viewed as but there was an bit of sexual subtlety in it. Another good version that I saw was Ferry Forst's from the Ringling and later Beatty Circus. He put one of his gorgeous daughters inside and at the end his other gorgeous daughter emerged. It got a great response from the crowd. Forst moved like a German Field Marshall in the Kalanag style but commanded the ring and attention in a classy and stately way. With his equally attractive wife, he had his own chorus line. Denny Haney also does a great job with the basket, I loved the girl's hand coming out of the top hole motioning him to come over. He comes over and swats the "hand" with the sword and knocks it off! (You realize that it is a rubber hand but you and the audience gasp and then laugh that they have been taken in)

Here I am performing my Pirate version of Indian Basket illusion from my 1990 illusion show tour. I made the basket ( from Celastic) and all the props, as well as the set and costumes in the show.

Brandi (Luana Fasulkey) was my long time assistant(1981-1991). The photos have been frame captured from my archive DVD of the show. **Dennis**



# the indian basket

**Illusionist Dennis Phillips and Brandi**

