

# MUM

MAGIC UNITY MIGHT

THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN MAGICIANS

July 2017  
Volume 107 Number 2



**RICHARD BOWMAN**

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# RICHARD BOWMAN – A Life of Service

## Interview by Richard Dooley

**Rich:** Let's start at the beginning; tell me a little about your early life.

**Dick:** I was three days late coming into this world on August 10, 1947; it seems as though I spent the next twenty to thirty years trying to catch up. My father was a factory manager and my mother worked as a secretary/bookkeeper. Our family lived in York, Pennsylvania. My younger brother, Jeff, and I spent our time playing sports, riding bikes, ice skating at the rink near our house, delivering newspapers, and working at the double-A baseball stadium for the York White Roses, a Washington Senators' farm team. I also worked at a supermarket during high school.

**Rich:** How did you start in magic?

**Dick:** I started like many others, doing magic as a child, although I think most of the tricks were con games to swindle the neighbor boys out of their allowances. When I was about eight, I saw a magician at a school fair who had me help with the Linking Rings. On the way home, I drove my dad crazy asking how that could be possible since I was holding the ring! My magic interest waned in my teen years. The fumes got to me – perfume and car fumes.

I was in my twenties when the Air Force moved me to Sacramento, California. At our church, I met a magician, Earl Rodgers, and we began trading tricks with each other. That rekindled my desire for performing and learning more magic. While on temporary duty to Eglin AFB in Florida, I met a magician, Bill Campbell, at the Officer's Club, who saw me doing magic for my coworkers. He took me aside and asked if I was in the I.B.M. I said, no, and we sat and discussed the need to be a part of the bigger magic picture. Soon after, the Air Force sent me on a remote tour in Saudi Arabia in 1981-1982, which provided me time to study and practice magic to evolve my character and repertoire.

I joined the I.B.M. while in Saudi; when I returned to Sacramento I began attending the Ring 192 meetings. There I befriended a fourteen-year-old magician, Scott Nelson Shawl, and we worked on new tricks and did some shows together. Scott went on to win the FISM Grand Prix in 2000.



1999 Publicity photo

**Rich:** Is that how Professor Higgins began?

**Dick:** Yes, it was a time when *Magnum PI* was a popular TV show; I liked John Hillerman's character, Higgins. Since there was a Professor Higgins in *My Fair Lady* and I was teaching a bit at the time, I went with Professor Higgins, teacher of magic, not elocution. That led to my magic school, The Supreme College of Amazing Magic or SCAM U as I call it. It was also a way to separate my magic business from my Air Force career.

Dick and I became "convention buddies" over the past several years – walking around various cities doing "non-magic stuff," creating memories of non-magic related fun, such as touring the Muhammad Ali Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2008, riding on the "Maid of the Mist" at Niagara Falls in 2009, scurrying around for a quick cheese-steak sandwich in the Reading Terminal Market in Philly in 2015, carousing around old Vegas, including visiting the Mob Museum in 2012. By the way Dick, wherever did that greenery used for our toga party leafy crowns come from?

On a couple of those visits, Dick befriended my family members. He was always a gentleman with them, and they join me in wishing him a successful year as national president.

Dick may be among the highest (if not *the* highest) ranking US military officer ever to serve as S.A.M. president. That discipline and coolness under fire will serve him well. He is smart, and can be serious and intense when needed. But when the time is right, that big, wide, disarming smile breaks out and the fun begins!

Please accept my best wishes for a great year at the helm of the world's oldest and most prestigious magic organization, Colonel!

– Richard Dooley, Past National President, Life Member,  
Investment Committee Chair, S.A.M. Magic Endowment Fund Vice-chair

**Rich:** Since we don't see them at conventions, who are your family members?

**Dick:** I am married to my wife of forty-seven years, Janet, and have two grown children, Andrew (thirty-eight) and Laura (thirty-five). Janet told me early on that this magic business was fine as long as she did not have to be my assistant! Laura was my assistant for about fifteen years, and now is an art teacher. She and husband Matt have two children, Eli (six) and Allison (three), who live in Denver. Andrew is a software engineer and lives in the mountains of Colorado. Janet and I met at Penn State the first week of the first term in 1965, and we got married when I was a Second Lieutenant in the USAF. We moved all around the U.S., and were also stationed in Germany. We have lived in Colorado Springs the past twenty-two years.

**Rich:** What did you do when you weren't "magishing"?

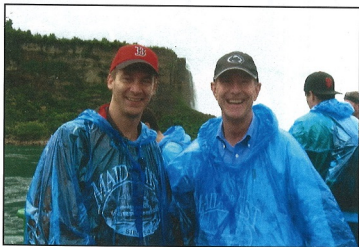
**Dick:** I enjoy sports, following the New York Yankees, Boston Celtics, and the Penn State Nittany Lions teams. We still ski and I play golf when there is time and I am not injured (I've had a few...). Janet and I both like to do lap swimming to stay in shape.

**Rich:** Okay, stop right there. Since you are a Yankee fan, I am tempted to stop this interview right now. I have lived in New England most of my life, and it is illegal for the same person to be a fan of both a New York and Boston-based professional sports team. So how does that happen?

**Dick:** Oops, I forgot you are a Red Sox fan...I became interested in sports in the '50s when TV began to show baseball games on the weekend. Even though I lived midway between the Pirates, Phillies, and Orioles, I watched the Yankees play; Mickey Mantle hit some home runs and I was hooked. He became my favorite player, and, of course, the Yankees were my team. In about the third grade (about the time I got my first magic book), I read a book about Bob Cousy, and I tried to emulate his ball handling moves in the alley behind my garage. It didn't hurt that the Celtics were a great team...

**Rich:** Tell us about some of the highlights so far as a magician.

**Dick:** Performing in many countries and states around the USA, I've been able to meet lots of great folks who enjoyed my magic, which made it fun for me. At my peak I did up to 125 shows a year while still working a full-time job. Now, my schedule is about half that, and I do a dozen or so shows a year for the five-star Broadmoor Resort for their holiday events and some corporate shows. There I get to meet people from all over who come to enjoy the area (which I get to enjoy every day!).



**Rich Dooley & Dick Bowman - Niagara Falls**

Anyone looking for ways to help his or her assembly should spend some time with Dick Bowman – a down-to-earth, look-to-the-sky, positive-thinking friend of the S.A.M.

Dick was able to distribute two handbooks by Earl Reum, *Magic Club Handbook for Officers* and *Magic Club Members Handbook*. A bio of Earl, written by Lindsay Smith appeared in the February 2011 *M-U-M*. The purpose of the handbooks is to provide the officers/members guides to help improve their meetings, make them more productive, provide incentive to gain new members, and just generally make members enjoy coming to meetings. They are quick references that outline pitfalls, problems, solutions, and suggestions to get your assembly back on track with meeting ideas, themes, and activities.

Recently Dick conducted a survey to find out what our members think and wish for the future. The results are guiding him and the national organization into the future.

Dick has always been there for The Society of American Magicians. He has served his country well and now will serve as national president. He is always a "go-to guy" for a thought about magic, national, assembly concerns or life in general. He has a sense of both the past and the present, which is going to have an impact for the future. We are in good hands.

Congratulations Dick and good luck in the coming year! –Tom Gentile



**Mob Museum in Las Vegas – "Who's idea was this?"  
(From left: Dick Bowman, Tom Gentile, Rich Dooley, and Rich Gilbert)**

**Rich:** What is it that you enjoy about performing magic?

**Dick:** I enjoy making people laugh. Whether it is children laughing at some crazy antics, or adults laughing at my innuendos, I want them to laugh at the same time saying, "How did he do that"? Whether it is entertaining at a child's birthday party, close-up magic in the spectator's hand, or a show for hundreds, the more fun my helpers have, the more enjoyable it is for me.

When I was in Saudi, for Christmas my wife sent me David Ginn's book *Professional Magic for Children*. I received it on Christmas Eve and stayed up all night reading and studying it. It changed my whole philosophy on performing magic. Hearing the laughter and the applause keeps me feeling young. I especially like doing magic for children, the wonder in their eyes and on their faces make performing so gratifying.

Our church is part of a citywide, interfaith, hospitality network with twelve other churches that rotates hosting and housing homeless families each week. The program helps find them jobs and housing and then new people enter in their place. I perform for them during their stay at our church. It is so much fun, since most of these children have never seen magic performed live before. They are so appreciative.

**Rich:** Do you have a "most memorable moment" in a performance?

**Dick:** Ha ha, good or bad? I've been lucky that I more fond memories of shows than bad ones, but the bad ones still hurt since I screwed up and let the audience down. As we all know, a singer can hit a bad note, or a stage actor mess up a line, no one remembers, but for a magician to mess up a trick... Probably one of my best memories was a young girl who came up to me after a show and said, "Gee mister, you really are magic."

**Rich:** Do you have a most forgettable moment? You know the kind that makes you wish you could really instantly disappear?

**Dick:** I remember doing the Gene Anderson Torn and Restored newspaper for a big show at McClellan AFB in Sacramento. Upon the flash restoration, the torn pieces slipped out of the gimmick and floated down to the stage. I couldn't wait to get to the next trick.



Teaching children

**Rich:** Is there something that makes you unique as a magician?

**Dick:** Probably not – I hope people enjoy my personality and the respectful way I treat my helpers. Magic is the most exciting of the visual arts, filled with mystery and wonder. That is unique among the arts and why working for the advancement of magic through the Society is so important. I also believe it is important for children to

Dick Bowman was the first person to welcome me to the Pikes Peak Prestidigitators, S.A.M. Assembly 170, when I first moved to Colorado Springs over twenty years ago. He was the assembly president; over the years, he and I took turns in that position. We quickly became friends and peers, because his magic persona, "Professor Higgins," was similar to my performing style. Plus, we share the added connection as engineer graduates from Penn State and avid football fans. We quickly trusted each other to share gigs and often perform together when multiple magicians were required. Dick even performed at Anne and my wedding.

He recommended that I become the Colorado State Deputy and later Regional Vice President for the S.A.M. We had our "corner" of the convention hall where we would hang out at the Magic in the Rockies convention. Because of his encouragement, I attended my first S.A.M. national convention in 2003, and I have not missed one since (and now, organizing the conventions is my job). He was the driving force to get the local club mobilized to support members who became ill, like Gene Kownacki or Larry Mahan, or in support of their estates by organizing the fair sale of their magic equipment, as he did with Trell Noells and Lonnie Brown. It was Dick who organized the construction and dedication of the memorial bench for my step-son, Jason Wojtkowiak.

He is an inspiration to us all with his friendship, honesty, and encouragement. It was my honor to nominate him into the S.A.M. national leadership.

My motto as national president was "You have a friend in the S.A.M." I'm pleased to say that his name is Dick Bowman. –Mark Weidhaas



At a Denver Broncos game. (From left: PNP Weidhaas, Convention Registrar Anne Weidhaas, Bowman, PNP Grosso, and PNP Miller)



Entertaining for the NCAA First Team Event



Handing out magic certificates

learn magic to help with their social and physical skills, and their ability to meet people and become confident in themselves. I think my ability to teach children magic is what I can do to give back to magic.

**Rich:** Who do you admire in the magic world?

**Dick:** I admire many of the magicians that I have followed down the magical path, magicians who are no longer with us who developed tricks and kept the secrets carefully guarded, sharing only with other magicians. Houdini, Keller, Thurston, Blackstone, Del Ray, and Roy Benson are men I admire for their skill, ability to entertain, and promotion of the art of magic. They paved the road in the art so that those of us today can enjoy learning, perfecting, performing, and teaching magic.

I really enjoy watching Michael Carbonaro and some of the crazy things he does and how he incorporates bits that only magicians see, like Johnny Thompson sitting in a waiting room. His use of live animals and insects is so creative. I also enjoy watching the unique magic acts on *Penn & Teller: Fool Us*. Those shows are entertaining and good for magic.

**Rich:** I'm sitting right here with you and you did not even mention my name. Kinda hurtful...

**Dick:** Oh, my mistake, I forgot to mention the world famous Doolini. An egregious oversight I am sure caused by the pressures of this interview.

**Rich:** When did you join the S.A.M.? With which Assembly are you affiliated?

**Dick:** Since the Air Force moved us around the country and overseas, I lived in cities where there were I.B.M. Rings, but no assemblies, so I did not know much about the S.A.M. When I took a job in Colorado Springs in 1995, they had Assembly 170, so I join the local club and the national organization. Mark Weidhaas and I joined Assembly 170 about the same time. We bonded because we are both Nittany Lions and love doing magic.

**Rich:** What makes you most proud to be an S.A.M. member?

**Dick:** I see the Society as my magic family. My friends at the local level and friendships I make at the national conventions are special to me. I never had a lot of close friends growing up and in the Air Force; we moved every couple of years, so I had to start over making friends with each move. Magic certainly



"Helping" Stephen Bargaize

helped me make friends, but the fellowship with my S.A.M. compeers is special. In the S.A.M. we are all equal and share a common bond.

**Rich:** What other roles have you had in the S.A.M.? Which of those do you feel has best prepared you for the role of national president?

**Dick:** Since I haven't started the job yet, I don't know what I don't know. I was an RVP for six years, but I think working on the Future Committee with Steve Finklestein was a great way to learn about our members. Developing and analyzing the two surveys we conducted has helped me set a course; I have a vision of what areas we need to improve. I don't know the answers yet, but I am confident that we will continue to work to make membership a good value.

**Rich:** When did you decide to "move up the chairs" in S.A.M. national leadership?

**Dick:** We were at a national council meeting in Denver; Mark Weidhaas, Vinny Grosso, and I talked a little about it. Since I was planning to retire from my job with the Missile Defense Agency in a year or so, the timing seemed right.



Four year old grandson Eli, when left alone with grandpa



Dick and Janet skiing at Breckenridge

**Rich:** Do you have a theme for your presidency?

**Dick:** "Let's Have Fun." If the surveys showed me anything, it was that magicians want to be serious about magic and have fun doing it. That's why having a meaningful and fun experience at assembly meetings with your peers is so important. The assembly experience is the fabric of the Society.

**Rich:** How about a summary of your career outside of magic?

**Dick:** I enjoyed a twenty-year career in the Air Force, serving as a logistics officer, retiring from the Pentagon as a Lieutenant Colonel. I then worked for the Missile Defense Agency for over twenty-five years as a contractor and government civilian. I have taught graduate classes in Space Law and Policy, Government Acquisition, and Supply Chain Logistics for Webster University for the past eighteen years.

**Rich:** On behalf of all our members, allow me to thank you for your service to our country.

**Dick:** Thank you, Rich; and my thanks to all my brethren in uniform, magicians and laymen alike.

**Rich:** So *are* you "retired?" Not retired? Neither? Both?

**Dick:** I'm retired from my "day jobs," but still doing shows and teaching for Webster University. Trying to keep the mind and body active. Living the dream...



Dick and Janet

**Rich:** List five interesting things about Dick Bowman most folks don't know.

**Dick:** Okay here goes:

1. Worked in a bomb factory one summer during college.
2. Was on the Penn State Figure Skating Team.
3. Is a Certified Professional Logician.
4. I am an Eagle Scout and received the Pro Deo et Patria award for service to my church.
5. Won the York, Pennsylvania, city model train racing championship as a youth.

**Rich:** "Logician" – did you just make that word up? Can you describe what that means in layman's terms?

**Dick:** I received my Bachelor's in Business Logistics at Penn State in 1969. They had just changed the curriculum from Supply and Distribution to Business Logistics. When I started there, I began my studies in civil engineering, but after taking advanced chemistry, I decided that I wasn't going to be building bridges for a career, since I had to take three more chemistry classes. I took a logistics class from a great professor and it just seemed to resonate with me, so I switched majors. Logistics is the art of getting the right things to the right places at the right time in the right quantities. It also includes designing systems to make that easier to do. That's the job of the logistician.

**Rich:** Best wishes for a great year as our National President.

**Dick:** Thank you. And thank you for doing this interview. ❖