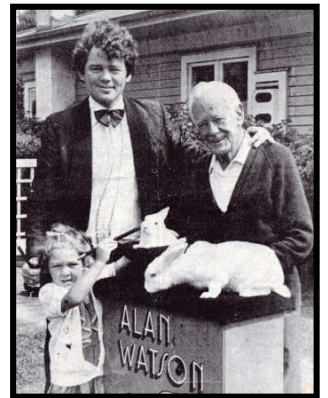


Alan Watson QSM

Alan Watson was once booked to perform 5 nights of table magic at the *Fisherman's Wharf Restaurant*, beneath Auckland's beautiful harbour bridge. When giving him the job Tom Hughes, the owner, said: 'You've got the job, but don't bend my cutlery.' That was 1978 and Alan was still there 5 years later performing 5 nights a week. He was resident magician at *Rainbow's End Amusement Park* for 26 years and when the *New Zealand Pavilion* from *Expo 88* in Brisbane was relocated to the *Lakeside Convention Centre* in Mangere in 1990 it was Alan who entertained the crowds. After falling visitor numbers it closed in 1996.

Alan Scott Watson was born in Wellington on 26 November 1950 to Betty (born Pierce) and Bob Watson, a corporate finance consultant. Alan has a brother, Mark, who is 3 years younger. The family moved to Auckland in 1953 where Alan attended *Papatoetoe West Primary*, *Papatoetoe West Intermediate* and in 1964 he was a founder pupil at *Aoerere College*. The Watsons were heavily involved in the Scouting movement; Alan's father was a Rover leader and his mother a Cubs Akela. In the 1960s Alan had his first taste of show business working on the famous South Auckland *Gang Shows*, which sadly ceased in 1979 when the producer, Bryan Chadderton, died in the Mt Erebus plane crash.

Alan's Uncle Oswald Ashton, who had married Betty's aunt, was a craftsman carpenter who kept himself sane in the WW1 trenches of France by practicing simple magic tricks. He encouraged Alan to take an interest in magic so that by the age of 10 he was conjuring at socials and parties. Oswald co-founded the *New Zealand Society of Magicians* in 1920, and Alan joined in 1964 but left 2 years later when rugby and girls became more attractive. He played for the *Papatoetoe West Int. Rugby Football Club* and the *Papatoetoe Panthers Rugby League Club* plus enjoyed Judo and Karate. Alan never gave up his interest in magic and in 1978 he took it up again seriously.



Alan had plans to join the Army to teach self defence but when his parents broke up in 1964 he moved to live with his father, who later became his driver, picking Alan up at work for school holiday lunchtime performances at *Whirling Bros. Circus*. He left college at 17 and joined the *Hugh Wrights Menswear* store in Papatoetoe, becoming their youngest branch manager two years later in 1969. Alan stayed with the company for another 18 years until 1987 when his interest in retailing led him to take a position as a technical salesman with *Precision Plastics* which allowed him time off to study and paid for his marketing courses. *Precision Plastics* was then sold to *Reese Plastics* and he soon became their top representative, turning over \$1,000,000 a year. When he resigned on 14 April 1989 his boss was so upset he fired him on the spot and gave him an hour to pack up his desk!



He and Mary married in 1973 and bought a house two years later. Nicole was born in 1977 and the twins, Larissa and Melanie, in 1980. Nicole's first words weren't 'Mummy' or 'Daddy' but 'gone' and she started working in her father's act in 1980, age 3, as a helper from the audience. Alan: "Hello little lady, have I ever met you before?" Nicole: 'No Daddy!' Larissa and Melanie joined the act five years later. When the marriage failed in 1985 and Alan moved out he gained joint custody of the children and realised that in order to have them and continue to work on the weekends he would need to incorporate them fully into his magic act. His mother, Betty, later married an offset printer with an affinity for woodcraft and Don Adams became a great help later in Alan's career when he built and fine-tuned the large illusions the *Watson Family* used at *Rainbows End Theme Park*.

It was 1978 when Alan took the huge step of taking his craft seriously. He prepared himself a 10 year plan, culminating with professional status in 1989. Jon Zealando encouraged him into joining the *Variety Artists Club of NZ* in 1978 and that same year Alan also rejoined *The NZ Society of Magicians* and the *Brotherhood of Auckland Magicians*. He later joined the *International Brotherhood of Magicians* in 1981, becoming President in 1986. He begun by accepting any charity or fundraising jobs offered then Guy Cater and Tommy Orchante flicked him jobs and pointed out venues that would suit him. He was lucky to be accepted into Keith Leggett's group of up and coming artistes being trained for television work;

acts such as; Tina Cross, Sally Saddler, John McGough, Derek Metzgar, Bo Runga, Howard Morrison, Tem Morrison, Annie Crummer and Jay Lagaia. Keith taught them all aspects of stagecraft such as microphone and camera work, make-up, costuming, marketing, networking, and script writing. Later on all these fantastic artistes went professional!

A solo mother at the time, Michele Niven's life changed overnight when she was invited to a party next door and watched Alan interacting with friends and performing sleight of hand. She was advertising and publicity manager for a book publishing firm and distantly related to James Bailey of *Barnum and Bailey Circus*, the man famous for importing *Jumbo the Elephant* into America in 1882. Alan and Michele found that they both shared a love of promotion and marketing. They married in 1988 and the Watsons joined her and the Niven children, Louis and Fleur, in their Birkdale home, a real Brady Bunch blended family.

Alan maintains that his career had four phases:

Mentalism and character work: 1974 – 78: In 1975 new options started opening up for Alan after his marriage. Agent Mary Throll was encouraging and found him work and he donned a huge *Humpty Dumpty* egg-shell and did strolling and stage magic for the *Rigby Star Reading Club* at *Henderson Square Shopping Mall* and *Lynn Mall* in 1974 to collect donations for *Telethon*. In 1977 Alan became New Zealand's second *Ronald McDonald* when *McDonalds* opened their Queen Street restaurant in Auckland but soon gave it up when he found his skin still exuding white face-paint two days later. Many new shopping malls were built during the late 1970s and a lot of school holiday work was available for magicians and clowns. American mime, Michael Lynch, taught him a fire act but Alan foresaw that it was not a healthy occupation and moved on. He got great publicity with his predictions but had to give them up when a local magician publicly revealed how one of his effects was done.



Table and Strolling Magic: 1978 – 85: Alan began picking up regular restaurant work at *Fisherman's Wharf*, *Hugo's* at Half Moon Bay, the *Papatoetoe Cobb and Co* and *Bronco's* in *Milford Mall*. He still has a residency performing close-up magic at *Wellington's Restaurant* in the *Waipuna Hotel & Conference Centre* in Panmure on Sunday evenings with Michele balloon twisting. In 1989 Alan worked at Bob Sell's *Circus Circus Restaurant* in Brisbane.



Larger stage Shows: 1985 – 2011: In 1985 the *Watson Family* became a regular act at the *Massey Lion Safari Park* and *Rainbows End* doing larger illusions and working with suited characters. At the *Safari Park* he brought lion cubs into their act with Nicole doing a lion-to-girl illusion and appearing with Jasper, a tiny six-month-old monkey. They also appeared at the *Footrot Flats* theme park and *Whirling Brother's Circus* on a regular basis. The first *Rainbow's End* stage was a stack of pallets with a plywood floor and the Watsons parked their van beside it as a changing room. Later a stage and entertainment complex was built. He regularly performed at *Lynn Mall*, *North Shore Galleria*, *Clendon Shopping Mall*, *St Lukes*, Manurewa's *Southmall*, *Hunters Plaza*, *Meadowbank Mall*, *Glenfield Shopping Mall*, *The Plaza* at Whangaparaoa Peninsula and saw a lot of work at *Royal Oak Mall*, *Manukau Mall*, *Heritage Park*, the *Oriental Market* and *Victoria Park Market*. Large corporate sponsors such as *Mobil* and *Mars International* provided him with products, a van with sign writing and 70,000 business cards a year.



He toured through various towns and cities in Australia and New Zealand three times with the *Chuck Jones' World Festival of Magic* and on Christmas Eve 1996 he appeared on the *Great Kiwi Magic Television Special*. Nicole, Larissa, Melanie and Michele increasingly worked together as the *Watson*

Family then in 2003 he started including his granddaughters, Aleshia & Tiffany. Work in the Pacific Islands flourished and eventually Alan would visit Vanuatu 3 times performing at local restaurants, a primary school, the hospital and local villages with the family; and also performed at the Hyatt Kingsgate in Fiji 9 times.



Corporate Shows: 1990 – Present: The twins each gave birth to daughters in 1990. By 1993 Aleshia and Tiffany were appearing on stage with their grandfather, 5th generation magicians. Alan increasingly specialised in trade shows and company functions travelling all over the country. He worked solo or mentored younger performers such as Paul Romhany, Jarred Fell and Alan's granddaughter Aleshia when she could fly up from the South Island for School holidays.

In 1990 Alan and the late Chris Parkinson (Radio Hauraki/Radio Pacific) founded a bulletin board for local magicians to share news and views and in 1993 they connected to the Internet. Often controversial and never boring, *MagicNZ* became the pattern for many international magic sites. He then created a weekly internet newsletter *Magic New Zealand e-zine* in 1999 which now has 17,000 plus subscribers in seventy-eight countries.

He's starting to slow down and his days of working an average of 10 shows over the weekend are over; nowadays he's happy to do 2 or 3. Alan and Michelle had 8 grandchildren, a rabbit called *Milky Way* and a King Charles spaniel called Merlin.

In 2015 he was granted the *Queens Service Medal (QSM)* for services as a magician.

In case you are as confused as I am, here is a breakdown of the clubs that Alan is involved with:

Variety Artists Club of NZ (VAC): This society was set up as a pressure group to support and promote the entertainment industry. Alan joined in 1978, 12 years after its inception. He became their Publicity Officer from 1984-85 and was back on the committee from 1994-1997 as editor of the newsletter. In 1994 the *Watson Family* cleaned up on Awards night with Alan, Larissa, Melanie and Nicole all receiving trophies. Alan continued to gain recognition picking up *Top Magician*, *Top Entertainer*, *Top Club Member* and finally in 2006 the *Benny*, the most prestigious award that a New Zealand entertainer can be granted, incidentally named after a New Zealand magician, Edgar Benyon.



Brotherhood of Auckland Magicians (BAM): Founded in 1945, it has a focus on professional and semi-professional working magicians. Based in Auckland the club has an outer and an inner circle. Since 1969 the *BAM* has awarded the *Grand Master of Magic Medal (GMM)* to leading professional magicians who have consistently shown high standards in their work and made a special contribution to the industry over many years. Alan joined in 1979, became a *Grand Master* in 2006 and a Life Member in 2017. He was voted President in 2013 a position with he still holds today. Over the years he has organised more than 100 lectures by international magicians to educate and benefit NZ magicians.

International Brotherhood of Magicians (IBM) Ring 160: is the New Zealand local of *IBM International* based in Missouri, America. It was founded in 1922 by magicians living outside major cities who were unable to attend magic club meetings and it held the first ever magic convention in 1926. Alan sat for 17 years on the Board of *Global Electronic Ring 2100*. *Ring 160* has been Auckland based since 1984; Alan joined in 1981 and has been President 5 times and a Life Member since 2006. He received a *Certificate of Appreciation* in 2002 and a *Presidential Citation* in 2005 and holds their *Order of Merlin* (2006) and *Order of Merlin/Shield* (2016).

NZ Society of Magicians (NZSM): Co-founded in 1920 by Alan's Great-Uncle Oswald it was based in Auckland. Alan joined in 1978 and was President from 1981-83 and again from 1986-89. Falling membership forced it to be dissolved and its assets dispersed to *BAM* and *IBM* in 2018.

Shore City Magicians Club (SCMC): Established in 1974 to cater to young magicians over 11 years of age who were at that time ineligible to join other magic clubs. Nicole became their first female and youngest President in 1991 at age 14 and dispensation was given to Larissa and Melanie to join when they were 8 years old. In 2006 6-year-old Aleshia became their youngest member ever. A number of magicians went on to have professional careers including past Presidents Paul Romhany and Mick Peck.

The Magic Circle: London (MC): was founded in London in 1905 and was male-only until 1991. Prince Charles is a member. The *Magic Circle* has an outer circle (MMC), an inner circle (AIMC) and a select group limited to 300 members (MIMC). Alan was admitted and made a *Member of the Inner Magic Circle with Gold Star* in 1995; he is now their New Zealand representative.

Society of American Magicians (SAM): Is the oldest fraternal magic organization in the world, founded in New York in 1902. The Watsons joined in 1990 and Nicole won the first *Kleinman Incentive Award* in 1991 at age 13 in Las Vegas, the equivalent of a *Rising Star Award*. In 2002 Alan and Michele received the *DRAGON Award*, granted to an international couple of magicians who have excelled and in 2010 and 2015 Alan received *Presidential Citations*. Currently he is their New Zealand Deputy and a Life Member.



Magic Castle (MC): Run by the *Academy of Magical Arts (AMA)* since 1963, it is a five-star private hotel and nightclub for magicians, situated in Hollywood. It has a number of different performance areas including small intimate theatres, a large stage and strolling environments. Alan was the first close up magician from New Zealand to appear there in 1987. Alan and Michele have appeared in both the *Close-up Gallery* and the *Parlour of Prestidigitation* for a total of over 100 performances. In 1991 at age 10 years Larissa and Melanie were the youngest magicians to perform on the large *Palace of Mysteries* stage, followed by Nicole who performed her award-winning routine. In 2014 Alan received an *Award of Merit* for his work with *Magic New Zealand e-zine* and was inducted into their *Hall of Fame*.



International Federation of Magic Societies (FISM): Founded in 1948 they represent 97 magic societies around the world. *FISM* organises the *World Championships of Magic* and supervises *Continental Championships of Magic*. Alan is a representative on their *International Special Awards* panel.