

# When Danny Met Sally

by Danielle Arnet

When two veteran Chicago vintage collectors/show promoters/sellers with off-the-wall personalities decide to launch a blog (www.whendannymetsally.com) about their love of all things vintage, what do you get? For starters, something not seen before in the collecting world. As Monty Python put it, "And now for something completely different."

Danny Alias and Sally Schwartz, longtime purveyors of the sometimes odd and arcane, birthed the site on February 14, 2011. Within 48 hours, there were over 1000 hits. In the first few days,

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more than 100 viewers signed on for e-mail updates. Delivering their inside views of and tips on the trade, it is, truly, something different. The world of traditional antiques will either love or hate it. For sure, many will be offended. These merry cutups are on a mission. Fair warning—Alias said the blog is adult, mature, and snarky. "It's not for everybody."

To understand the site, it helps to know the principals. Alias (pronounced like the police a.k.a. tag) owns, with partner Jeff Nelson, the multi-dealer 20,000-square-foot Broadway Antique Market (www.bamchicago.com), a two-story emporium of all things vintage. The market showcases 75 dealers. Born Duane Scott Cerny, he became Dan Alias while doing standup comedy. When MCs in altered states could not manage "Duane," the name changed. That also explains the Alias surname.

A dealer who once put a taxi-dermal t w o - headed goat in his shop window as part of a vintage Thanksgiving kitchen tableau, Alias had attended college on a poetry scholarship and has, in varied incarnations, headed a "very new wave" outfit called the Emergency Band. And, in a more restrained mode, he became a responsible captain of commerce. Total fools cannot pull off running respected and highly successful shops for over 20 years. Obviously, there are two Aliases.

Now, this is a man who pens underground theater (more on that later) and in 1983 cut the underground hit "Civil Defense." It's had such a successful afterlife that a French label will re-release it soon. Catch it on YouTube (where it is labeled a classic) by keying "Civil Defense Danny Alias."

Owner/operator of the lively outdoor Randolph Street Market, which operates during summers in the city, Sally Schwartz has a long history in

vintage clothing, jewelry, and all things vintage and visual—plus a million friends on Facebook. Head of an events production company and a lifetime collector, Schwartz organized large tented antiques shows on Chicago's lakefront before launching the Chicago Antique Market in 2004. After the name scared off younger attendees ("to them antiques were something old and smelly"), the event moved to a new site as the Randolph Street Market. Immensely popular with young-thinking buyers of all ages, the event umbrella related vintage and designer shows.

Growing up on Chicago's fine North Shore, a graduate of New Trier High School (more traditional cred), and having a degree from Virginia Tech in business and marketing, Schwartz lives with her teenage daughter in a Hyde Park apartment recently featured in a shelter blog and Huffington Post (as was Alias's). Clearly, there are two Schwartzes as well.

The two 50-somethings moved in the same circles and knew each other casually for decades, but the Big Idea happened after Schwartz went to a play that Alias penned, *The Bloody Fabulous Curse of Dragula*. A send-up of *Sunset Boulevard*, featuring a drag Countess Dracula, it got three



stars in an on-line blog review. During an extended lunch in December 2010 at Ina's Kitchen in the West Loop, the two decided to mesh talents.

"We wanted to have people look at vintage in a different way," said Alias. "The media portrays vintage in a décor dumbed-down way. Most just don't get it."

"We wanted to use our humor to show the business from our perspective," added Schwartz. "We want to market to designers and decorators, to people who love to wear and decorate with vintage."

If WDMS seems like another hook to grab young collectors—it is, sort of. Not for nothing is the blog subtitled "Vintage with a Vengeance."



The introductory page to the When Danny Met Sally Web site.

"Sally and I have actively pursued the young collector for five years," Alias said. "We know that they go at a much faster clip, media-wise." Catering to the cohort's generational media ADHD, the site is packed with bizarre visuals Alias has collected for decades.

"This is not your typical twenties-something blog," he added. Offbeat content lures viewers, but solid exposition and extended text provides meat for the generations that read. For speed processors who tend to scan headings and move on, there are click-on icons so they can comment, share to Twitter and Facebook, and receive e-mail notices.

At opening, the portal page featured a bearded lady, a werewolf, and other images too disturbing to describe. Vying for attention were headlines such as "U.S. Economy Found Dead in Freak Viagra Overdose" and "I.N.S. to I.R.S., We're N.F.S. and S.O.L!" Nothing geared to the fogey crowd.

Once entered, the site has enough visuals to scramble brainwaves, plus a video interview with the auteurs that features Schwartz wearing a pink marabou bed jacket and Alias in some sort of sleazy smoking (we assume) ensemble. On the same page, a side banner with click-on departments lists "Bricks & Mortality," "Collections & Recollections," "Dis-N-Dat," "I'd Live There," "Objects & Objections," "Sexy Sellers," "Show Business," "The Manners Bitch & Mr. Snarky," and "Trends, Predictions & Predilections." Adjacent introductory content is short. Opening paragraphs with color photos offer tease content for the departments. Readers must click to continue. First-week content included the scoop on a local framer favored by dealers, a passage on

Valentine's Day telegrams, and an extended photographic history of and inside look at Chicago's iconic Palmolive building, where Vince Vaughn has a penthouse. Sexy Sellers featured a dealer who's a standup comic and nudist. A photo shows him semi-wearing a toga.

Later updated headlines read, "Back from the Dead Technology" and "Collecting Tattoos, or I Could Really Use a Hand, an Arm or a Leg Here."

A sidebar link led to the quiz, "Hoarder or Collector?" Sample question: "Do you have an unnatural obsession with packaging containers, paper, ephemera and free premiums, storing and whoring like a carnival tramp?" Add a Scratch & Sniff Horoscope, and you get the idea.

Alias and Schwartz write all the material. Guest bloggers are in the pipeline (several have asked to be added), but content will be by the authors, updated regularly. Goals include more coverage of shows that currently fall under press radar. Long term, they aim to become a go-to site for all things vintage (news, info, goods). That includes building the blog into a vintage Web-shopping channel.

Tempting as it is to dismiss WDMS as a spawn of *The Goon Show* and *MAD Magazine*, fact is there's solid content mixed in with the humor and hysteria. A tendency to be Chicago-centric will probably lessen as the site gets its legs.

Does collecting *have* to be so stuffy? Schwartz and Alias are betting that it does not. These wild ones have been around long enough to know who's who and what collectors and potential collectors really want. They also have experience in how to reach the outside ring and draw it in. "We're doing this for ourselves," Alias said. "We're going to show people things they've never seen."

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