

THE CHAINLETTER

AN E-NEWSLETTER BY AND FOR THE
ESCAPE COMMUNITY

August 2023
Volume 14
Issue 129



Tony Gough Rest in Peace



This month's Chains...

We lost one... Farewell Tony Gough	1
The GEO Convention	1
Tennessee's young escape artists	8
Steve Spade honored!	12
Mark and Sheila Cannon Lecture	13



The First GEO Convention

The International Escape Artists Convention was born out of an idea from Allan James Taylor, Andrew Basso, and Cliff Gerstman. During the pandemic, they wanted to bring the world of escapology together and decided to create a group called the Global Escapology Organisation (also known as GEO). Fast forward to March 2023, and the first convention was born. The event was held at the National Emergency Museum in Sheffield, England. The initial convention was set to be one to remember as the United Kingdom Escape Artists (UKEA) was keen to get together.

The event was action packed with lots of lectures and competitions, everything had been planned to detail with not a single thing missed, well apart from the terrible weather! On the morning of the event, Sheffield had been hit with a huge blanket of snow which had brought all public transport to a standstill and even prevented the museum staff from being able to open up for us in time. Luckily the hotel we were all staying at came to our rescue and gave us a huge room to use until the museum staff were able to open up safely. The convention room was soon filled with staging and escape equipment galore! We were ready!



To kick off the unforgettable joint convention we began with, you guessed it.... A handcuff challenge!

The Doncaster Restraint Museum (DRM) kindly sponsored the handcuff escape challenge supplying cuffs with 4 different levels of difficulty to challenge the members. With a limited edition set of Gold plated 95th Anniversary handcuffs up for grabs for the winner along with a unique laser etched piece of wood from Barry Spector, using wood from Houdini's house in NY.

The curator of the Doncaster Restraint Museum (Aaron Firth) took the microphone and explained the rules "No keys, no rapping, and no slipping." The rules appeared draconian to



everyone and soon the reality of the challenge dawned on each competitor as the cuffs appeared. Administered by the master locksmith, Chris Gower the first round was about to begin. The Handcuffs in the initial round were ASP Model 100s. Aaron's voice continued over the sound system "This will be an elimination competition, on your marks, get set, and go!" Starting with seven budding escape artists, there would soon be crowned only one winner. In the words of competitor Coxy,

"I felt time stand still, I looked down with dread as my shim failed to meet its mark. The plastic shroud had slipped which meant I would have to pick the cuff. Scrambling for a lock pick I heard a voice "That's one free who will be next?"

With just 5 now left in the competition, the second cuff chosen was the HIATT Hinged. This



was set to be a tough round, Coxy continues to share his experience "The cuffs clamp and the klaxon sounds – this is a pain. All three pawls are mocking me as I attempt to subvert their cold grasp. My shim was true, and a gentle squeeze on the bow freed my hand. No time for relaxing, I am still trapped! I set to work on the other cuff. It struggled briefly, but then it surrendered. Free again – But for how long?"

With only 4 now left in the competition, a wry smile comes across Chris Gower's face as he walks over to the notorious and legendary Chubb ik70 Detainee Handcuff. Coxy shares, "I was planning my attack and I barely noticed the start signal had occurred. I rushed to jam my shim in, but no, I felt the shim slip down the side of the pawl. I had just jammed the cuff. Fighting to free my shim, losing time, and the cuff continually mocking me I managed to free my shim. Time to reset and start again. I felt the bow go loose – Success. Now for the other wrist. As the second cuff falls by the wayside I stand up pleased that I managed to just scrape through into the final. I am now hesitant to see what the final cuff will be."

SOUTHORD

www.southord.com



Now down to three competitors, the final cuff is revealed, the Rigid TCH 840- a UK standard Handcuff. The tension builds for everyone. Coxy continues; "Time seems to stand still. Every action I take is small and calculated. Moving the shim gently into position. It feels good. It's in the right place. I squeeze the bow and jump clear of the cuff and my seat – The



handcuff thuds to the floor. I had done it. I had won the first Handcuff

Competition. An incredible feeling flowed over me. And do you know what the best bit was? This was just the beginning of an epic convention".

Next on the agenda was Andy Roberson's fantastic Cable tie lecture which saw him showcase the methods he has used to capture audiences for many years. We were all wowed by how visual it was! Andy highlights to us "It remains to be my all-time favourite street escape as it's quick and brutal to all who see it."

Following on from Andy, safety and stage management expert Devin Steinfield joined us from The Illusionists to have an in-depth conversation with Andrew Basso followed by a Q & A. Steinfield taught us all that ultimately risk management does not need to be complicated to be effective. The number one thing an escape artist should know to do is how to break down the act into components and address each part individually.

Knowing your safety crew is essential and ultimately can make the difference between life and death. Steinfield's talk certainly gave us some food for thought and gave some fantastic tips on keeping us safe during our performances.

Aaron from the Doncaster Restraint Museum followed with a hands-on talk, which saw him share his latest additions to his collection, Aaron tells us



"I also had the pleasure of showing delegates, patrons of the museum and their staff, our fantastic prison van which is fully operational and a real asset to DRM." This was certainly one of the convention highlights.

We finally had the news that we had all been waiting for, the museum was finally open! This was a perfect opportunity to have a bite to eat whilst making our way over to the venue. The last talk of our day was by Chris Gower on Houdini and his Daily Mirror Handcuff Challenge in 1904. Chris explained his idea on their development and their complex Bramah lock mechanism. He gave credit to the research Mick Hanzlik did and how Mick had proved Houdini and Thomas Froggatt were friends for many years. A new breakthrough came a few years back when a photo and article was published in The Tatler Magazine, this showed a cuff different from the one in the Copperfield Collection. Finally, he showed us an excellent copy he made of the Solid Silver replica handcuffs - although cast in a silver-looking alloy they were very convincing.



To end an inspiring day, we couldn't help but take some time to take in the amazing building and all of its original features. The venue was not only once a Fire station but also a Police station too. The shared station once had a layout that allocated the police to the left side of the ground floor. This included four cells, 12 stables, an office, an interview room, the inspector's office, and an inquiry desk. This area is now the museum's reception.

However, we were all keen to see what was left of the cells. A sign above one of the cell doors reads; "The Crime and Punishment Cell" certainly not for the faint-hearted as it houses a display of weapons used along with gruesome stories about historic murders from across the



local area. The abundance of artefacts and memorabilia was eye-opening and the rest of the building didn't disappoint either. The right-hand side of the building from the ground floor upwards is made up of the fire station, which displays the highest fireman's pole in the UK. Dating back to 1898, the Victorian building features huge rooms packed with displays of retired police cars, ambulances, and fire engines along with a plethora of artefacts including photos, videos, and interactive exhibitions which all tell a fascinating history of the emergency services.

After a good rest, we were ready to start our second day of the convention. Kicking off the day we enjoyed a fabulous talk from Ann



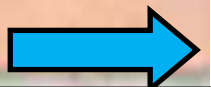
Beedham, who gave us an engaging insight into Randini. Randini tells the story of a young Sheffield boy who became a close friend of the great Harry Houdini who helped him create his most iconic escape. Sharing never before seen photographs and stories, we were all wowed by Randini's inspirational wealth of knowledge and ideas.



Stuart Burrell continued the theme of sharing the history of escapology's inspiring individuals with a lecture about the History

of Escapes before Harry Houdini. Jack Sheppard, notorious English thief and prison escapee of the early 18th-century London was spoken about in great detail. Stuart magnificently ended his lecture with a strongman challenge, which saw him completely role a solid- Morphy Richards frying pan!

It wasn't long before it was time for the next challenge, The Plasti-Cuff challenge. Eight budding escape artists were keen to take part. Secured by Dave Cox "Coxy" each individual was restrained using the standard double cable tie street cuffs with one aim, escape!





There are various methods of release possible, but the challenge not only requires lots of practice and knowledge on how

to complete the escape but it was made harder by competing against other fellow knowledgeable escape artists. Andy Robertson sported his escape extremely well and within 17 seconds he had achieved 1st place!

Dave Cox completed the last lecture of the day by sharing his wealth of knowledge with us all about the History and secrets of Handcuffs and Padlocks in Escapology. Members also had the opportunity to try each item out too!



Throughout the weekend six escape artists took part in UKEA's Mick Hanzlik Award. The Mick Hanzlik Award is presented to the member who is voted to have presented "The Best Escape" in memory of fellow Escape Artist Mick Hanzlik. Andy Storm was delighted to take home the much-desired award with his eye-watering and utterly brutal wrestling escape. Set within a Wrestling ring and strong metal back structure Andy is restrained by a metal bar at the top of his head and by metal chains covering the opening of his mouth and around his neck which were secured by padlocks.

Aaron from the DRM took great pride in ensuring he was tightly secure. He continued to restrain his waist with a tight leather strap, secured by another padlock, and handcuffed his wrists. If that wasn't enough, he continued to restrain his ankles with leg irons, again fastening them to the metal structure that he was forced against. Much to our horror, the commentator introduced professional wrestler Tyler Owens who looked extremely energised and ready to rumble. The only way for Andy to win against his opponent is by escaping within his time limit of just 5 minutes. Every 30 seconds Tyler

will be allowed to attack with one weapon only. He showed us a large table



filled with what only can be described as potentially brutal items if used incorrectly. First up was a ferocious slap on Andy's chest, everyone screamed as Andy took hold of the pain, clutching to the restraints to begin his escape. Next up was a solid Kendo stick closely followed by a metal tray to his forehead and before we knew it we were surrounded by the remains of what once was a computer keyboard.



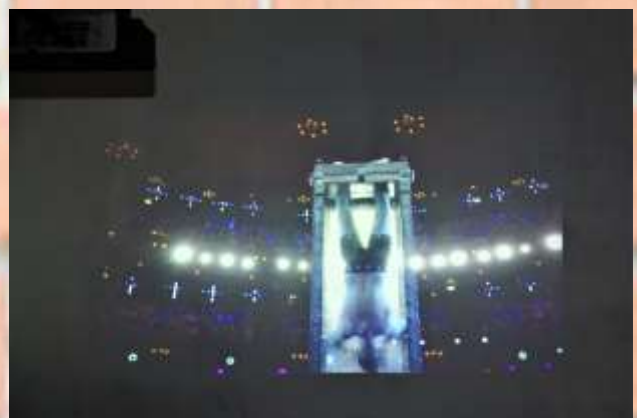
"Without a key"
For all your lockpicking needs
www.withoutakey.co.uk

Andy continued to take on more torture from the wrestler enduring a staple gun to his head and body which was followed by a wicked blow to his back with a metal chair. By this time Andy had managed to free himself from all restraints but still had the leg irons to contend with. To end the vicious battle, a five-foot florescent lighting tube was launched across his head, only to see Andy rise from his feet with glory, he was crowned the champion of the Mick Hanzlik award for 2023.



The final award to present was the “David De-Val Award” which is awarded for the escape, public demonstration, or the promotion of escapology by an escape artist or performer within the past twelve months. The award is given each year in memory of David De-Val who was a master escape artist and magician from the UK, over his career he escaped from handcuffs and other restraints, as well as performing many spectacular escapes, many of which were from prison cells. It should come as no surprise that the wonderful Andrew Basso was gifted with this coveted award for his jaw-dropping performance during his time on Britain’s Got Talent, elevating the world of escapology.

As I’m sure you will all agree it was a thoroughly enjoyable event enjoyed by escape artists all over the world.



More convention photos



A great tribute site to the amazing
David De-Val



<http://www.davidge-val.com/>

Have the lads at
Guinness turned down
your world record?

Online World Records
can help...

Contact Fenyx Fyre
info@fenyxfyre.ca

Tennessee's Young Escape Artists



While I was surfing the internet looking for escape artists and escape related material to present in The Chainletter, I happened upon Sher'ril and

Samantha. These two ladies are sisters, and have been performing professionally for over ten years in their home state of Tennessee. While you can find a number of reviews of their show and their work online, I thought I would take this to a little deeper level, and interview them directly. Given how young they started, I think they are doing rather well for themselves. Check it out...

CL: Who would you say are your inspirations, or who you would like to meet in the escape world?

S&S: We'd both pick Houdini instantly because he's our main inspiration for getting into the realm of magic/escapology, but Samantha's other pick Talma, the "Queen of Coins" for her sleight of hand skills and Sher'ril's would be David Copperfield because of his impressive career as being one of the most well-known magicians among laymen and those uninitiated in the magical arts.



CL: You started performing very young. How has that effected your shows?

S&S: We're at the ages of 24 (Sher'ril) and 20 (Samantha) and have been in this business since 2012. At



the beginning, our ages really impacted our ability to get performing gigs. Somehow, when you're a fourteen-year-old girl telling people that you and your ten-year-old sister are professional escape artists, they just don't believe you. Nowadays, our ages don't have an effect on lining up performances, but our career itself does sometimes have an effect on our relationships. As for balancing our magical lives with our personal lives, that can be a bit of a challenge. Our primary work space, where we do all our planning, practicing, brainstorming, etc. is at home, so it sometimes feels inescapable. We can't leave work at work, because we're always at our workspace. Currently, we're working on finding and maintaining that balance between magic and personal time.

CL: Do you find that your age invites Hecklers? How do you handle such people?

S&S: We've never had too much trouble with hecklers. When we first began performing, we had a couple "hecklers," but no one was ever directly disrespectful or said or did anything that couldn't be laughed off in good fun. In recent years, our audiences have been much more respectful of our performances and any comments made are usually by small children who are just having a great time.



CL: Do you find your parents, or other loved ones trying to talk you out of doing escapes?



S&S: . Yes, we've had some very wonderful people in our lives that we love dearly try to talk us out of our career as escape artists and magicians. There have been times when it felt like we were making an enormous decision to continue performing despite knowing that some of our family and friends may not approve, but the joy we bring to our audiences is worth it. We still talk to the people who don't approve of our career, we just don't talk to them about it anymore.



CL: What made you choose escapes rather than any other form of magic?

S&S: Why Escapes? We originally wanted to be private detectives like Nancy Drew and thought that if any "bad guys" caught us while we were on a case, we should know how

to escape things like rope, chains, handcuffs, etc. We got pretty good at tying each other up in scarves, ropes, and snuggies, and escaping was a lot of fun. When we read a biography of Houdini's life, we both decided to make the career change. Since escapes are what we knew before we really knew any other form of magic, it was a natural transition for us.

CL: What escapes do you do in every performance? How do your audiences react to seeing two young girls being restrained in dangerous situations?

S&S: After our signature escapes, Sher'ril's Triple Layer Escape and Samantha's Tom Horn Belt Escape and our Double Escape, our audiences react with relief from the suspense and excitement for the success of our escape, always with applause, whistles, and shouts. During the escapes, though, there's a tension in the air when people begin to fully realize what restraints we're up against. Sometimes we can see our audiences leaning and squirming in their seats as if they're trying to help us out by maneuvering themselves in their chairs. It's kind of like watching the audience of a boxing match, when people are making fists of their own and punching the air in support of their preferred fighter.

CL: What do you think motivates an escape artist to do what we do?

S&S: We think one thing that motivates escape artists, us at least, is that it's exciting, and unusual, sometimes even in the realm of magic. Not many people are doing escapes because they're challenging and risky, sometimes dangerous. We love escapes because of the challenges and the puzzles, but also because escape acts are so straightforward and often very real. Most magic routines require patter or tell a story, or they need some sort of premise or misdirection for them to work properly. They're fun, but they're just tricks. The premise of escapes is to be in, with little to no chance of getting out, then beat the odds and get out. The audience gets to see what you're doing and watch you work through the puzzles of the ropes, handcuffs, straitjacket, etc., and it's a sort of testament to human ingenuity for them, an underdog story that isn't a story.



CL: How did you learn to do the escapes you do? Did you have a trainer, or were you on your own?

S&S: A lot of what we learned was through trial and error. Not many of our escapes were learned from books. However, before our first show, we bought the DVD series on escapology from Penguin Magic with Dixie Dooley as the instructor. We learned a lot from those DVDs and have grown so much thanks to the inspiration and information Mr. Dooley made available.

CL: Have you read “The Art of Escaping,” by Erin Callahan? It is about a high school girl who becomes an escape artist.

S&S: We have not read “The Art of Escaping” by Erin Callahan, but we’re definitely interested in reading it sometime!

CL: Have you met any other escape artists live?

S&S: We once met Kristen Johnson (aka Lady Houdini) at a county fair, after we had been performing for about 5 or 6 years.

She was really nice and had a great act, but it didn’t really affect our career one way or the other. Still, it was awesome to be able to meet another female escape artist and her husband. We still follow her on social media and it’s always great to see her updates.



CL: How do your parents feel about the idea of your doing potentially dangerous escapes?

S&S: Our mother did forbid us from ever performing escapes underwater, but both our parents have seemed rather confident in our abilities when it comes to other escapes. We haven’t yet had the opportunity to perform any aerial escapes or escapes that are universally accepted as dangerous, but we and our parents know the risks and will take every safety precaution possible, with the exception of not going through with our escapes. That’s one precaution we just can’t do.

CL: What are the exact details of your signature escape?

S&S: Sher’ril’s signature Triple Layer Escape is an escape from 100 ft of rope on top of a straitjacket, on top of handcuffs. We’ve had several people ask how that works, but that’s a trade secret.

CL: Do you have any interest in dangerous escapes?

S&S: We’ve always wanted to perform some aerial escapes and escapes that involve deadly spikes and fire.



CL: Have you ever gotten stuck in an escape? How do you handle that?

S&S: We have been stuck in a couple of escapes, actually. Once, Samantha was tied up for a comedy rope routine after we had performed in a musical with some friends. Unfortunately, she hadn't eaten that day since breakfast and she was feeling very weak, lightheaded, and nauseous. Fearing that she was about to vomit, she stood up in the middle of the routine, and ran to the bathroom, her wrists still tied to her legs. The audience thought she had actually escaped, and that her running away was part of the act, so they applauded and we played it off as best as we could when Samantha, who did not vomit, came back.

When Sher'ril was stuck in her Triple Layer, some of the rope had gotten hung on her hips and as Sher'ril was trying to escape the rope, she slipped on the slick floor, causing the several layers of rope that had been around her chest and arms to cover her face and begin to smother her. Sher'ril continued her escape, wriggling and jerking on the floor of the stage area, terrified, but unwilling to call for help, for about 2 full minutes, until she eventually escaped the rope and could stand up again. Thinking it all was part of the act, our audience was thrilled and applauded as the rest of the performance went largely as planned. After the show, our parents said they would have assisted Sher'ril by helping her stand up, but they didn't know that her struggle was more than acting.

Now, we are currently in the process of making up a non-verbal distress signal that will be unnoticed by our audiences, yet alert our team if we need assistance.



CL: Do you buy your escape equipment? Or do you design and build it yourself?

S&S: Our father helps us design and build a lot of our props, so some different and better tools for that, would definitely make things go easier. There are some things we use in our shows that we purchase already made, but we typically refashion them or use them differently than their instructions recommend to suit our specific acts.

CL: A question I get asked all the time is, if a police officer locked you in handcuffs right now with your hands behind you, could you get out without help?

S&S: Yes, we could. It might take a little while depending on how we were cuffed and whether or not we had access to a Bobby pin, but we could escape. When we got our first pairs of handcuffs, we would actually cuff ourselves and sit around picking them for fun! Come to think of it, answering that question really makes us want to start that up again.

CL: What advice do you have to offer to other young magicians and escape artists?

S&S: Our first advice is to think outside the box. Thinking outside the box and learning business skills will be a major boost for any budding magician/escape artist.

CL: Have you ever attended a magic or escape convention?

S&S: Due to scheduling conflicts, we've never been able to attend any magic conventions, but have always wanted to. We would absolutely be interested in an escape artist convention! If one is ever organized, we'd love to attend!



Irish escapologist nabs prestigious magic award in US

by Roisin Butler 8/4/23

An Irish escapologist is flying to Las Vegas next week to scoop up a prestigious international award.

Steve Spade is an escape artist and professional magician. He has been hailed in the past as Ireland's Houdini due to his dangerous and enthralling acts.

The Limerick native was informed in May he had won a Merlin Award for his contributions to magic. Famous recipients of the award include American entertainer David Copperfield and Max Maven.

Steve told Dublin Live: "Other magicians who've won are people I've idolized as a kid. I'm still not 100 percent sure how I was selected as a winner."



Steve is the sole Irish member of the Global Association of Escape Artists. His other ventures include a podcast set up to platform struggling magicians during Covid-19.

He added: "We started interviewing magicians globally. It didn't matter if you were a headliner in Vegas or a small name... everyone was out of work."



He also performs magic at weddings and other functions nationwide. His high profile wedding clients include Rob Kearney and Fair City star Johnny Ward.

Steve explained that his love of magic transpired in childhood. He learnt a great deal about the art from his uncle and pledged to become a magician himself when he grew up. Steve added: "He did semi-professional stuff during his college years. He'd always have a trick to show me and I could see from a young age what a kick people got out of it."



The escape artist will head to Las Vegas with his partner Elaine on Thursday. You can find out more about Steve's escapades on his [official website](#).



Mark and Sheila Cannon Lecture!



On August 19th Ring 96, my local chapter of the International Brotherhood of Magicians held its monthly meeting. This meeting was very unusual as we had a lecture from Mark and Sheila Cannon.

I went out on a limb booking this lecture as most of the club are close-up card magicians, and a few stage performer. This combo of book report and escape show was going to be an interesting night.

First was the escape show opening with combination handcuff and lock box escape. A volunteer was invited to examine a pair of handcuffs. The cuffs were placed on Mark's wrists. The handcuffs were covered with a security box that covered the keyholes completely, and then Mark's wrists, handcuffs and all, were placed in a clear plastic lock box, held shut with a metal bar that ran through the security box and the lock box, and all was padlocked shut... When the box was covered with a cloth, Mark was free in 11 seconds.



Next came the double straitjacket escape. The first jacket was an official Posey brand. These are used for restraint and transport of the mentally disturbed and the criminally insane.



This jacket is much harder to escape from as it has a belly loop and side loops. These effectively hold the

arms tightly to the sides and make any arm movement very difficult. After that, there was a second jacket put on. This was similar to a straitjacket, but it is called a transport jacket. This has no arms but buckles tightly over the first jacket. Thick ropes were clipped onto it, and two volunteers held Mark tightly. Mark managed to struggle out of one jacket and then the other and received a rousing round of applause.

Lastly came the diamond plate box

escape. This box was designed by Mark himself. It was well-researched, well-built, and amazingly well-performed. This is a strong metal box made from construction-



grade material with three locks on it. Mark made MacGyver proud by using his belt to deal with one of the devices holding him in.

After a short break, Mark returned to the main event. His lecture about the book he has written called "Lincoln's Scout."

Many of the people in the audience, close-up magicians though they be, complemented me on choosing the best lecture ever. Kudos for Mark and Sheila.

