

The Chainletter

An e-newsletter by and for the escape community

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The Global Escapology Organisation



**Has arrived.
Are you interested?**

This month's Chains...

GEO Has Arrived!	1
How To Perform a Scout Show.	1
Tools of The Trade	6
GEO—Global Escapology Organisation	8
Escape Artist—Next Generation	9
Ms. Morgan—IBM Cover Girl	10

Triple Play! From Mark Tripp



How do book and perform a boy scout or cub scout show.

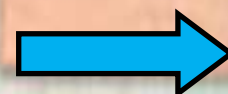
Your editor had a two-hour phone conversation with Escape-Artist Mark Tripp. Mark has had years of experience doing Science magic



shows, and escape artist shows. He learned and honed his craft working with many great performers. Currently residing in the state of Michigan, Mark has decided he wants to give back to the escape artist community and share his experiences. This article is a bit of



history and a bit of a how-to go about organizing, selling and presenting an escape show to scout troops and scout packs. There is money to be made, and a ready-made audience just waiting for you to come in and claim it.



Mark has come to a basic understanding. No matter how you look at it, no matter what motives you might believe are in play, if you are doing a kids' show, then the kids are looking to catch you out. The kids are looking to earn the badge of "Ha ha, I know what the magician did!" This attitude is to the detriment of the entertainment value, as Mark and most magicians I know are interested in having an audience forget their troubles and problems for a time, and feel a little bit better for the time they spent watching a magic show.



Some kids can be unpredictable as well. One show, after producing a live rabbit, Mark put a towel in his lap and sat with the rabbit offering kids to come up and pet the cute little creature. One kid about tenth in the line grabbed the bunny and yelled "This is not



real!" as he began to shake the rabbit forcefully.

Mark was forced to brutalize the kid to rescue

his rabbit. He twisted the kid's wrist and literally kicked the kid back down the line suggesting to the parents that the kid should get therapy.



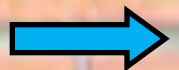
The rabbit survived the encounter, and Mark had no expectation of being rehired by the group, but somehow, he was. Many people might realize that torturing small animals is how many serial killers start their careers. That might have been why the parents appreciated that he stood up to the little sociopath.



Sitting in a room quietly wondering how to set up a show that children could not ruin, hijack, or heckle, Mark compared his situation to Bruce Wayne sitting in the dark wondering how to fight crime when a bat flew into his house. Mark also had an epiphany at that point. He realized that the kids do not see a magic show as fun or fantasy, they only want to challenge the magician. What better way to meet a challenge than with a challenge? Then it came to him. An escape show is all challenges and that would be what he would do.

But, getting from an idea to a full-fledged marketable show would take some work.

Mark had worked for Don Viano doing a show called "Houdini Lives Again." This was a show that featured a guillotine escape.



"Wild about Harry"
John Cox' Houdini web site
www.wildabouthoudini.com



It scared the heck out of everybody, and it tuned out there was no gimmick to it. Don wanted people to see him react with the idea that if he screwed up the escape, he really would pay the price for it.



The show also featured a Water Torture Cell for a finish. Mark would report that adults would approach him with concern, letting him know that they would have enjoyed the show even without that part, as it just looked too scary.

Don and Mark would do multiple mall shows, setting up the Water Torture Cell and letting it sit out with a sign that advertised the show. Sadly, the days when malls paid for entertainment are long gone. These would have been free shows except that a (name withheld by editor) car company had paid the mall to have entertainment in their name. All Mark and Don had to do was push the product in the show to get paid. The money they made was quite good and it planted a seed for Mark's future escape show.

This chapter ends with many other magicians wanting to take a piece of the mall action, and some even approached the mall offices only to find out there would be no pay day there for them.

Another pointer Mark picked up was at the Cannon's first convention. This was held in Indianapolis. Mark was disgusted by the number of escape artists who were bragging and blustering, and came away feeling that the ones who did not bloviate, but simply connected with their audience and did their performance were far



superior as far as entertainment went. A key question to ask is "Do you take the time to question what your audience is thinking?" Don't make ridiculous claims. Don't brag, just be an entertainer.

After performing with Don Viano for a time, Mark took over the act and was soon accused of stealing. Many people do one kind of act or another that has Houdini's name somehow involved, but Mark was able to stave off the lawsuits and continue his work.



The Magic Nook
www.magicnook.com

"Do-It-Yourself" Magic for
"Built-It-Myself" Magicians



A great tribute site to the amazing
David De-Val



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

After his moment of clarity, Mark came up with the following act that can be sold to Boy scout troops and cub scout packs...

To begin the show, Mark will call the Scoutmaster on stage and offer him a puzzle. He will lock the Scoutmaster in a pair of normal handcuffs and cover the locking mechanism with a lockbox. Then he tells the scoutmaster, armed with a key to try and get out. There is an unnamed reward offered if he can escape. Of course, the lock box covers the keyholes and the Scoutmaster is stuck fast. This is done as a warning to the kids... stay quiet or this might be you. Mark says it works well.



Opening: Start with a simple in and out rope routine. This sets the stage for what you can do and builds anticipation.

Second is the German (Siberian) transport chain escape. Don had a legitimate German one that he used to use.



Third is a multiple handcuff escape. Originally Mark would use a jacket to cover his work, but later graduated to using a podium style screen for cover.



This site is well worth the time to study if you want to learn about lock picking
www.lockpickguide.com

Begging Box!

Your input
is our output!

This is the part of The Chainletter where the editor begs for you to give him some material to publish. No idea what to write?



Well, How about...

- ◆ Your first escape.
- ◆ How did you learn to escape?
- ◆ Your creative process.
- ◆ Your last escape.
- ◆ Who is your hero? Why?
- ◆ What makes a good escape.
- ◆ Your escape bio.
- ◆ An escape you saw on TV.
- ◆ An escape you saw live.
- ◆ Anything escape related.



**If you are
interested in
occult escapology,
you want S. Rob!**
<https://www.srob.co.uk/>

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

Behind the screen, Mark would drop one cuff at a time to the floor. This is a very effective technique as all the audience saw how many cuffs you were wearing. The audience will soon begin counting out loud. You can use different brands of cuffs for this, but the idea is that all are the same basic lock, a swing through arm. That means they can all be shimmed. You can call attention to the different brands, styles, history and attributes, but all are easily shimmed and drop off one at a time.

The fourth act is a straitjacket escape. Make sure you get adults to put you in the jacket. Be sure to have a high-quality jacket that will stand up to the rigors of daily use. You never know how hard an adult will pull a strap and if it breaks, depending which strap it is, you are probably done with that for a while till you can find a new one.



For the fifth act, go back to the Scoutmaster who has been sitting in handcuffs and a lock box the whole time. Let him out and then offer



to do the escape he could not. Draw attention to how the lock box covers the key holes. Then under cover, shim yourself free easily.

Take your bows!

Mark warns those of you that might do this, not to spend money on high security cuffs and make them shimable, unless you know you can do it successfully; otherwise, you are wasting money.

Your lay audience will not know the difference visually between high security and regular handcuffs so any cheap pair will suffice.

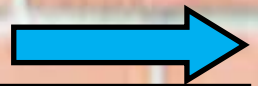


What made this work for Mark was when he was driving one day and saw the sign for the Genesee County Council on Scouting. Every



major City or County has one. It is a building where the administrative work is done to keep the scouts running smoothly. Walk into that place that is local to you and hand them maybe 200 flyers

for your show. Scouts are always looking for fund raising ideas and the administrative office can include these flyers in their mailings to all their local troops and packs. Mark's flyer touts a show called "The Man Who Was Houdini." It includes the escapes, and is also a historical and therefore educational experience.



**Have the lads at
Guinness turned down
your world record?
Online World Records
can help...
Contact Fenyx Fyre
info@fenyxfyre.ca**

Mark's next recommended step is to do your show for a while to as many scout groups as you can.



Then get a local map. Use a compass to circle an area that is perhaps 30 miles from your house. This will be your show area. You can

use a larger area if you like, but consider how much time you want to spend driving, especially if you have more than one show in a day. So, find all the libraries and elementary schools in that circle.

Call them. Send them a flyer. Show up in person. Take a school principal to lunch. Pick their



brain. What message did they want to reach out to their kids with? Do they want an anti-drug campaign, make sure you have a show for that. Do they need an anti-bullying campaign? Have a show for that too. What a great way to reach an audience.

If you are looking to bring an escape show to a young audience, Mark's plan seems like it could be a winner. He certainly made a few dollars off of it.

Thank you, Mark, for the interview and the advice, I hope our members enjoyed at and make use of it. You never know who might see a show and decide that they want to do escapes one day too!



Tools of The Trade: Amazon Lockpicks

Did you know you can buy a hidden lock pick kit from Amazon.com? It is right up there with purchasing a pregnancy test from the 99 cents store. (not making that one up)

You can do it, and the price is very cheap, but what do you get?



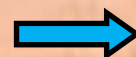
Remember this kit is advertised as a "hidden" lock pick kit, so you get it in a form you can hide it easily. Like a credit card. But this credit card will fool only two kinds of people, first it will fool someone who barely looks at it. Second it could fool a complete moron. Think about it. No name on the card, different languages, misspellings, and different logos too. No, anyone who looks at the card will know it is a fake. You can stick it into your wallet with some other cards, but there is still a problem. It is noticeably thicker than a standard credit card. The manufacturer has spared no effort in



producing a product of low quality. The card slides open, like a window up and down. Not a terrible idea, but the card gets loose after just a few slides and then your kit will spill all over the place. I put some tape in to tighten the slide and that seemed to work. Overall I found the case to be a tribute to shoddy workmanship.



Inside isn't all that different. The idea of what is inside is not bad, but maybe it could be carried out a little better for a few



cents more.

Inside the kit are five tools, a double sided torsion wrench with two different sizes. A Dimond



pick, a hook, and two styles of rakes. I dare say that combination will get you through most simple padlocks. There is one issue. Have you ever had a lock pick break into the lock you were trying to open? Two possibilities here. You shake the lock and the broken piece falls out; carry on then. You shake the lock and find the broken piece is hopelessly jammed inside the lock. Swear... and go get some bolt cutters. Even the key won't open it anymore. These picks are stamped out of thin metal. They might be aluminium; I doubt they are steel. If you have ever worked with sub standard picks you know how easy it is to break one off. (Your editor has done that) This should not happen with a quality product unless you are abusive to them.

Next issue is how thin they are. They are not comfortable in the hand and you'll have to perform fine motor movements with them. It



can be done, but not easily.

Here is a photo of this kits squiggle rake next to a "Southord" example of the same pick. Notice that one is bigger, and has a thicker handle. It feels better in the hand and better in the lock as well.

Now we come to the hidden flaw. The torsion wrench. Here is a photo of theirs with one I



had from an inexpensive kit. I am not even talking about the twist in the wrench which I can work with just fine, or live easily without.

The Amazon kit double sided wrench is 2-dimensional. I guess it had to be to fit inside a credit card, but think about what that means. When you insert the wrench into the lock it has to go in pointed straight down. For those of us who like to have the wrench at three or four o'clock, this has to

go down at 6 o'clock. I guess you could try 12:00 high noon, but I think you



would block the pick by doing that.

Now the big question. Can you pick a lock with an under five dollar lock pick set? The answer is yes you can. I did that, but it was not easy or comfortable in my hand. The again, let's remember what we have. This kit is touted as an emergency lock pick set to be used when

something goes haywire. If you get into trouble and need to pick your way to freedom, this kit may be hard to use, it may be



uncomfortable to use, but if you need a lock pick unexpectedly, the best pick to use is the one you have.





Global Escapology Organisation

GEO, the Global Escapology Organisation is less than 1 month old and has already met with several successes.



The brainchild of Allan Taylor of the UKEA and with founding members Andrew Basso and Cliff Gerstman, the vision here was bigger and more far reaching than any of the local groups might be. Hopefully this group will have a future and include some real commitments to the ethical behaviour and treatment of our fellow performers.

This group which includes members from the United Kingdom Escape Artists,



American Collectors, Escapologists and Sideshow, and CanEscape, is hopping to connect escapologists from all over the world and we are off to a good start with both comradery and mutual respect and assistance.

Firstly, the requirements for membership are a



bit more stringent than some other clubs. We wanted members who were committed to the art and committed to moving the art forward. The simple act of

performing, and being able to pick simple locks and handcuffs is a fine demonstration of this commitment. If you are committed, and if you read this newsletter you likely are, you might want to join too.

<https://form.jotform.com/210692266000041>

What has the GEO done so far?

In our short life, we have...

Admitted several excellent members who possess high levels of skills, and years of real life “on stage” experience.

We’ve had a successful (so far) set of introductions of all our escape artist members and administrators.

These members have already started working together. Looking at work, looking at stunts, and



looking at events with a specific eye toward improvement and not criticizing or belittling anyone.

We’ve had a “funny escape” shown for the first week of that feature and it led to a wonderful conversation, as our members began to discuss the value of the escape for entertainment and “good taste.”

We’ve had a failed escape feature start which also sparked a conversation as to what could have been done better to make that escape work.

Another feature is the caption of the week photograph. Here members get to caption a photograph of an escape or escape artist, possibly in an unusual situation. This is just for fun.



For those performers who felt they were not yet ready to submit an application, we’ve had a class to prepare them. (see next article)

All that in one month?!

You know this group is going to get something done. If we can do all that in quarantine, imagine what will happen when we can again go live and meet in person! Break a Chain!



Escape Artists: The Next Generation

For those of you who, like me, worry about where we will get the next generation of escape artists, Our friend Chris Campbell is on the job and taking care of business. On Saturday March 20th he taught a class in basic lock skills. Starting with eight students, Chris taught a two-hour class in basic lock picking, specifically dealing with padlocks and



handcuffs. The reason was simple. The new GEO Organization has asked that members demonstrate these type of skills.. The class was to last two-hours. The class

went so well that it lasted an extra half hour.. How successful was the class? Check this out...

I cannot express enough gratitude to Christopher Campbell for mentoring me in my escapologist quest. I had prior spoiled knowledge of proper pick techniques and as a straitjacket performer to this class but no raw skill with rudimentary picks. Learning Bobby pin and paper clip was so fun. Chris is not only intelligent and respectful; he also is super supportive of the group as a whole. It doesn't matter what your skill level is it's impossible not to learn more in this immersive environment. Mahalo plenty for having me. It's an honor to carry on ancient traditions in the art of escape with the new blood artists coming together on evolving platforms.

-Jolynn

And another satisfied student....

To start off, I have to say that I am beginner level, at best, entering this experience. It was an honour and an interesting time being a part of this class and I learned a lot and met a group of wonderful and talented people. It was a lot of fun and I learned a lot. Chris has a way of staying consistent and keeping it lightly comical to keep your attention. My daughter (who has focus issues) sat in for a short period of the class and didn't turn away or move the entire time. Even though from the beginning he brought up safety and planning he made that a part of the focus while she sat in. He made it a point to explain to her that a present parent was VERY important as well as the importance of having a plan and a signal at ALL times. Being aware of the safety and the level of precautions that are taken while performing escapology, I purchased my daughter a set of handcuffs to practice with. Even though we had the barrier of not being in the same room, Chris still did a fantastic job of explaining things in a way that were clear and I was able to retain a lot of what he taught us. It certainly was a pleasure to be a part of this class and look forward to taking more.

-Amanda



So lets all take a hat off to Chris, our successful "escapology 101" teacher. He focused not only on the hands on aspect of opening locks, but also on safety which is vitally important. Hopefully, once

the pandemic is over and the quarantine is lifted, we will see some new names and faces performing and interpreting the art!



Ms. Morgan - IBM Cover Girl

