

# The Chainletter

An e-newsletter by and for the escape community

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**Be my**



**Valentine?**

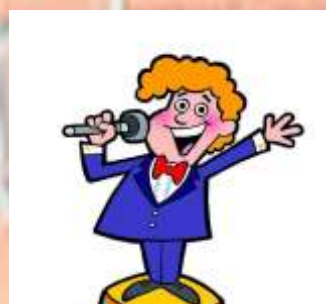
## This month's Chains...

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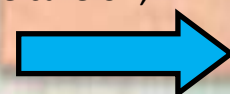
## UKEA/ACES Zoom Convention

Wow! What an event we had on February 6th. This event ran eight hours. That's right, I said, eight hours. The best part was the timing of it that allowed both Americans and Europeans to be part of. Starting a nine A.M. pacific time, 12 noon eastern time and five pm London time allowed for people who have not connected in years to be together. It was amazing.

We had 40 attendees at the event and our co-hosts Allan and Rebecca Taylor along with Cliff Gerstman agreed that Allan would act as the emcee for the day. Some of the guests included people who have been active socially during the quarantine, and some who have not been seen in a while.



We started up a bit early to allow everyone to get online and get comfortable. We had a few simple bits of housekeeping to take care of, including online etiquette,





And then we were off.



The first speaker was **Andrew Basso**. Andrew is Italy's premiere escapologist having appeared in the live stage show "The Illusionists" for the last nine years.

Andrew opened by explaining the gruelling schedule that comes with such a show. While on tour there can be as many as 3 shows a day and over 300 shows a year. This can lead to a serious problem. Andrew explained that you can get into a serious rut and being to act robotic. The audience may or may not be aware of that, but they will sense the energy if it is not up to what it needs to be.

When asked about how much control he has over his performance while part of a touring show like that, he explained that the producer had chosen the water torture cell for him to do, but that presentation and script was up to him. The only exception was while appearing on Broadway. There he was given scripting.

Andrew spoke of the line between possible



And believable. He says he learned at age 27 the exaggeration takes away from believability.



Asked what it is like inside the water torture cell, he told us that he couldn't see out of the cell. The lights all made the clear walls look like solid light reflections, but he can hear quite well. At this point there was a physicist in the Zoom who wanted to explain why that was, but he held his tongue so as not to interrupt.

Andrew explained that when he was in the spin off show "The Illusionists 1903" he had to dress the part. The 1903 style bathing suit was not comfortable, but he managed to make a few changes to make it work. Besides that his performance had basically the same script.

Someone asked if Andrew if the milk can escape "Creeped him out." He explained that it was psychologically more challenging. It is pitch black and you can not see a thing. You can barely move inside there as well. The worst part is you cannot do it in full view.

Several comments followed including that complacency is the enemy, it is when things go wrong.

Dorothy pointed out that Steve Santini once passed out in a milk can and had to be rescued.



"Wild about Harry"  
John Cox' Houdini web site  
[www.wildabouthoudini.com](http://www.wildabouthoudini.com)





Also it was bad for her hair.

Apparently one escapologist (Genosta) was killed when a can he did not know was dented in transit would not open.

Next speaker up was **Trevor (Wolflock) Cuchet** speaking about the importance of knowing the culture of where you are performing. Firstly, see if you can arrange to have a translator. Many schools might be willing to offer a free translator in exchange for a show for the school.



Secondly don't assume that your usual jokes will go over. They may not be funny to another culture even though they produce endless laughs when you are at home.

Avoid towns that cater to tourists. Tourists have seen many shows and may be a bit burned out.

Don't expect applause. Many cultures have different ways of expressing enjoyment at seeing your show.

Don't insult the country you are in.

Be respectful and diplomatic. Some countries will arrest you for insulting their royalty.

Don't assume you can get equipment in or out of a country. Some places will confiscate your escape equipment as illegal.

Research well what you can take out of a country. It is better to be prepared than to be robbed of your belongings.



Try to avoid equipment that locals will not recognize. For example Russians don't use straitjackets.

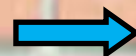
Check weather and seasons before you go and be appropriately prepared.

Get used to local food before your trip. Performing with a stomach ache is no fun.

Be careful with travel permits, most countries do not allow professional performing with a tourist visa.

Always ask audience members for feedback after the show, you might learn something,

Always be respectful, be kind, smile, and watch your attitude.



**The Magic Nook**  
[www.magicnook.com](http://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/>



Off we go to the Doncaster Restraint Museum, with Aaron "Jake Bullet." This museum is located in Doncaster in the United Kingdom, and features not only an amazing amount of restraining devices, but also an incredibly knowledgeable guide to take you through it all.

Jake showed us 20 pairs of handcuffs, all from different ages and a hideous restraint chair used in China which your editor had become fixated on. Thankfully, this time I got just the right view and now know how to defeat the thing. I felt better for that.

Jake's passion for handcuff collecting started as early as age ten when he ordered a pair of Chinese cuff online using a postal (money) order and had them shipped to a friend's house.

Some of the highlights of his collection that he showed us included...

- ♦ A Chinese and Russian version of a cuff to the wall system
- ♦ Three unusual higher security Smith & Wesson cuffs, the 94 and the 104. Both using unusual keys. Also the S&W 926 which is green and has a different type of lock.
- ♦ A spiked ankle device which really slows someone down
- ♦ An amazing pair of Batcuffs.

Go visit this museum when you can, it is fascinating.



**This site is well worth the time to study if you want to learn about lock picking**  
**[www.lockpickguide.com](http://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](http://www.withoutakey.co.uk)**



Hard to follow a presentation like that but **Dorothy Dietrich and Dick Brookz** were up for it.



Dorothy opened with a video from You-Tube that showed her doing the upside down straitjacket escape from a burning rope. She added that had she fallen, a height of more than three stories would be fatal. That is why she always has a safety team on hand as well as back up safety devices in place.

She performed in Buffalo, New York, where there was an issue. The fire department did not want to sanction the use of fire. Dorothy told them confidently not to worry as it was “fake fire.” They let her do the stunt.



For many years, Dorothy ran “The Magic Townhouse” on the east side of New York City.

There she would pay three acts to perform for the guests and customers, and then allow up and coming magicians an opportunity to practice material in front of a real audience. The townhouse had to close due to skyrocketing rent in New York City. This is when they moved and opened in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Dorothy is considering offering virtual tours of the museum during the quarantine.



Asked why escapes? Dorothy told us that she went to Catholic school as a child and was impressed by a magician who performed there. She liked how he held the attention of all the kids. She went to the library to find a book on magic and got Walter Gibson’s “Houdini on Magic.” She also had the experience of often getting tied up or locked in by her siblings. She always escaped!

Dorothy ended her presentation by telling the story of how she led the effort to repair the bust on Houdini’s grave site. Quite an effort and a major success.



Time for **Stuart Burrell** to take front and centre, and talk about his efforts to create a Cavity Cuff.



Apparently it is difficult to hide things inside a handcuff. Stuart opened up a pair of Haitts, which took three weeks of hard work, and found out there is little space to spare if, any at all. After spending a great deal of time and effort to achieve limited success, he found out that no less than Ian McColl was working on a pair.

Worse still, a magic shop in the U.S. was advertising handcuffs by presenting an open exposed view of the works! Stuart sent a harsh letter and the ad was stopped.



Needless to say Stuart has yet to create a working pair of cavity cuffs, but for the future, who knows?

Now it is time for a Q&A session featuring **Chris “Fenyx Fyre” Campbell**.

Chris holds several world records and it always pushing the envelope further in his sideshow and escape routines.



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



Chris is also an amazing innovator, inventor, and builder.

### ***Where did Chris get his name Fenyx Fyre?***

Early in life Chris met an old stuntman who taught him the skills of “Fire” magic. This is where the name comes from.

### ***Where did his love of escapes come from?***

Chris was raised in a cult where he was often kept in cages and other restraints. He learned on the job to get out as he needed to. Continuing to perform and set world records is an escape to help him overcome the painful memories.



### ***So, why continue with escapes?***

As a boy Chris was constantly told “you can’t do this.” He wants to prove he can do that and prove he wants to live.



### ***What is your favourite escape to perform?***

Embaling machine. Chris loves water escapes. Afraid of

water from an early life incident, so Chris works to beat the fear.

### ***What is the secret to a great escape?***

Don’t worry about what your colleagues think, worry about what your audience thinks.

### ***Have you ever been in a “gone wrong” situation?***

Yes, Chris was badly burned on much of his body due to a bounce sheet used in washing his clothes. He has also been stuck in “jammed” cuffs underwater but managed to get out.



### ***What do you want to do that you haven’t yet?***

Big stage illusions.

At this point Chris showed off a new ice pick he has for doing blockhead routines. The wooden handle of the ice pick having been made of wood that came from Houdini’s former residence in New York City. It was very impressive. Houdianist John Cox pointed out that wood from that house will soon no longer be available.

Now we welcome veteran escapologist **Michael Lee** to come to the stage.



Michael introduced himself by giving his impressive bibliography of escapes and consulting. Today he still does escape shows at raceways for events.

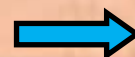
To Michael, safety means, “being protected from harm or unwanted outcomes.” or “Protected from predictable hazards.”

Michael opened his official presentation with a list of escape artists who have come to grief while performing when something happened that should not have...

One was Moodini, who failed to escape big loop cuffs and was whipped into the air by a chain tied to a racecar.

Another was a motorcycle stunt performer who made a successful jump and had a good landing, but not enough room to stop and shot out over a 30 foot cliff.

And no list of escapes gone wrong is complete without mentioning the late Joe Burrus who was killed doing buried alive.





The major focus that Michael put out to us was LNTC Leave nothing to chance. Murphy of Murphey's law fame is in full force when you do detailed work like escapology and you need to be prepared; rehearsed and ready.

Michael talked about being ready not only for mechanical failure or pieces and parts that might malfunction, but also be sabotaged by a rowdy volunteer.

He told stories of straitjackets arms being knotted and twisted before being buckled. One member having a lock pick stolen. There were other stories too that we all know too well.

Your crew are your eyes and ears while you are working. They need to know your methods in case something goes wrong. Good idea to have your crew sign a non-disclosure agreement.

Another important point was that you can't avoid the learning curve.



Put in the time to practice till you are perfect at it, and avoid costly mistakes that can occur when something unexpected happens. If you put in enough time you will have seen all the outcomes, and nothing unexpected can happen.

Discussion followed on the importance of having a plan "B" or even a plan "C."

The presentation was very well received, and ended with a humorous story about a company



that made a straitjacket out of sailcloth and put a gorilla in it. The gorilla wanted none if it and tore the jacket to shreds.

**Chris Gower** was our next presenter.

He started by using a ball point pen to open the circular crank key lock of a pair of Haitt chub style cuffs. Then he showed off a few different brands



and models of chub cuffs. He showed the intricate inner workings of this style of cuff and pointed out that there are fifteen million different combinations of key set ups. So, how to do the escape from a borrowed pair?

- ♦ have an assistant swap out the keys.
- ♦ Put a small wooden block in to prevent the cuffs from fully locking

Chris showed us a high speed way to make a key using an epoxy like product that comes in a kit. This was followed up with a very clever handling of a routine to free the escapologist from a borrowed pair of handcuffs. Quite a stumper if you're not in on it.

And that ended the official Convention, but there was more.

Chris Campbell showed us a video of a brilliant self designed water escape. This met with strong approval from all.

A question was asked about who physically has the "Doors of Death," the Norman Bigelow signature escape. Dorothy thought Janet Bigelow (Norman's widow) had possession of the still. One suggestion was that Norman had given



them to Thomas Black prior to his passing, but leads to another puzzle as Thomas Black also passed away rather young and unexpectedly. Several members talked about in interest in rebuilding and performing the doors of death.





Stuart talked about the safety and legality of his upside down chainmail straitjacket escape. If you have never seen a



straitjacket made of chainmail, this is something worth seeing. Stuart is quite the creative man.

We were almost ready to wrap up when it was pointed out that if we kept the meeting going a few more minutes, we would hit eight hours. So we did.

John Cox, the famous Houdinianist, talked about some of the myths regarding the Houdini legend.



First and foremost did Houdini ever escape from a milk can full of beer. It certainly makes for a fine legend but is it true. If anyone would know this it would be John from all his research.

John says it did happen, he also spoke of a milk can full of milk. In the legend Houdini even went in head first. Scientifically that makes no sense. Still it was Houdini and John says that happened at least twice.

Question about the incident in which Houdini loaded Minerva's milk can with Lye. (Sodium Hydroxide) As the legends go and grow, who knows if this really happened. Minerva's husband swore Houdini had done this to sabotage her career, and maybe even kill her. For all of John's research, he cannot find word one about this incident; not even the year it was supposed to have happened. It was pointed out that water purity regulations and pollution limits did not exist until after world war two, and as such the can could have been filled with polluted water, or foul smelling water and the husband chose to blame Houdini.

The convention ended with a discussion regarding the single season TV show "Houdini and Doyle." A nice period piece that made little attempt to truly capture what the two protagonists might really have been like, but still a fun little pastime.

At the eight hour mark we wrapped it up with everyone agreeing, we have to do this again!



Witness the birth of an exciting new group with an incredible amount of potential. This was a meeting between Allan Taylor, Andrew Basso and Cliff Gerstman. We all agreed that there was such success in the Zoom convention that we just had, that it was a good time to keep it going. We all agreed that this group shall keep a low profile, and be based on a private Facebook group.

There will be an application process, similar to the one used by the United Kingdom Escape Artists, this is to allow the kind of discussion we would not want to have in front of the general public.

For now the group will be mostly in charge of Facebook discussions and Zoom meetings, but in the future... Who knows where this might lead. Conventions? Mentoring the next generation of Escapology performers? Members helping others in getting paid gigs? The possibilities are all there if we work together. There will be rules of conduct of course. Be nice, don't steal, and remember we are all of the same mind-set, so act as such. So, If you are an escapologist, come apply! Email us at [members@the-geo.com](mailto:members@the-geo.com) and ask for an application.





# L.A. Grandfather Returns Handcuffs

LOS ANGELES (KABC) -- Grandparents can pass along powerful life lessons to the next generation. One man is trying to do just that by teaching his grandchildren that it's never too late to make amends.

On Thursday, the Los Angeles Police Department posted on social media that its West Valley Station received an interesting package: a pair of handcuffs, \$100 and a heartfelt letter of apology.

The person who sent it? A 74-year-old grandfather from Vista in San Diego County.

More than 60 years ago when the man was a teen, he was at a local Bob's Big Boy restaurant when he witnessed a scuffle involving an LAPD officer. He ended up with the officer's handcuffs after they flew off and slid toward him.

He picked them up, took them home and held on to them for all this time.

"I have felt a little guilty each time I saw the hand cuffs over the years, but did nothing about it," the man wrote in the letter.

Recently, his grandsons - ages 6 and 9 - visited him and were playing with plastic handcuffs. That's when the grandfather showed him the handcuffs he had and shared the story of how he got them.

"They were aghast and asked me why I stole the handcuffs from a policeman. I, of course, had no good explanation and I told them it was the wrong thing to do and I

wasn't proud of it and then I danced around the subject," the letter says.

Feeling guilty, he sent back the handcuffs to the LAPD, along with the donation and the apology that LAPD later posted on social media.

"The note is addressed to you, but is partly intended for my grandsons," the grandfather wrote.

The letter ends with one more apology: "I am sincerely sorry."



## Fastest Straitjacket Escape While Standing On Machete Blades

London, Ontario, Canada / November 4, 2016

Fenylx Fyre performed a straitjacket escape in 38.84 seconds while standing on machete blades.



He set the record at a charity event held by Joe Francis and Dylan Fidler of the Forest City Collective for The Boys and Girls Club, Koats for Kids, at Delta London Armouries Hotel in Ontario, Canada.



**WARNING:** This record can be extremely dangerous. Please do not attempt this record unless you are above the age of 18 and trained as a professional stunt performer. We will not accept submissions in this category from minors.

