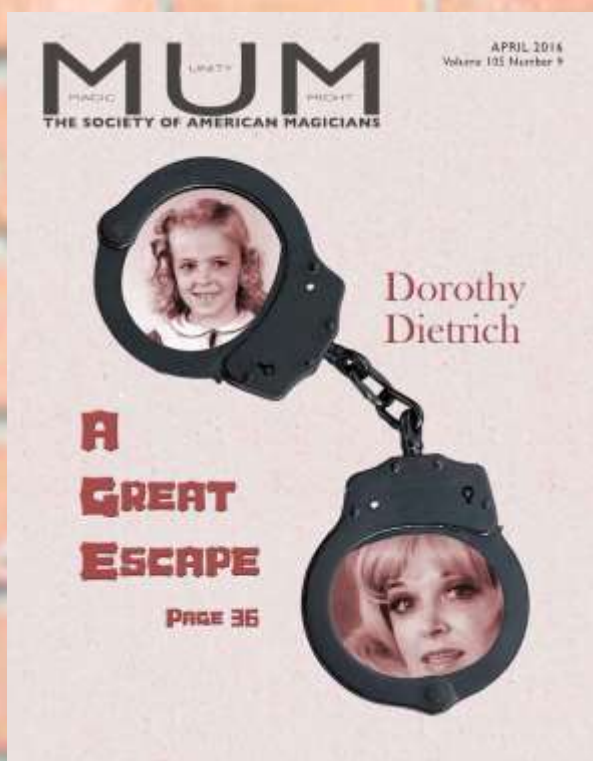


The Chainletter

An e-newsletter by and for the escape community

Feb 2021
Volume 12
Issue 117



This month's Chains...

Dorothy: MUM's the word	1
An American EA Zoom Gathering	1
Next Zoom Gathering	6
Update	6
Dorothy Dietrich: Interview Online	6
Where Are They?	8
Convention?	8

An American EA Zoom Gathering

Five hours!

Five hours?



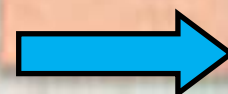
Yes, five hours. That is how long the American Zoom gathering of Escape Artists lasted. We started at 4 pm California time on Sunday the 20th of December and finally ended at 9 pm.

Of course, the time varied depending on time zone. For example, our Zoom host Chris Campbell started at 7 pm and ended at midnight... but he is on American east coast time.



There was a core of about 16 people present for most of the gathering, but others came and went along the way. In total there were probably about 20 people present which is not bad for a list of only 30.

One of the best things about the gathering was the fact that everybody got their own moment to shine and show off their experience, skills and ideas.



There was a pleasant air of comradery and any rivalries that might have existed were put aside. This made conversation easy, and your editor, did not even realize how much time had passed. I reconnected with some old friends, and made some new ones. Of course, if you weren't there, well it would have been better if you were. We'll have to catch you next time.

First up we introduced ourselves, basically stating where we were from and what our specialty was. Some notable introduction included our long-time

**HELLO
MY NAME IS...**



friend Sheryl Garrett who takes photographs for Jeff McBride. Simon Robb the occult escapology author, told the story of being kidnapped and using his skills to get free. Escape artists Michael Patrick and Tony Parisi popped in to say hello, and it was great to see them for the first time in about 15 years.

The first presentation was to come from Stuart Burrell the British escape artist and world record holder, but he was unable to attend. Cliff Gerstman filled in for him and presented his grandiose but certainly doable idea to use the Blackpool magic convention to



set a world record. Imagine if you will all the magicians in the room doing the same escape at the same time. Stuart believes that the largest such escape group of all time was about 50 magicians and as such, Blackpool being the biggest magic convention in the world would make for a huge world record. Cliff pointed out, and Bruce remembered the time we had about 80 escape artists and handcuff collectors in straitjackets at the Cannon's convention. 80 was good, but Blackpool would be bigger... Much bigger.



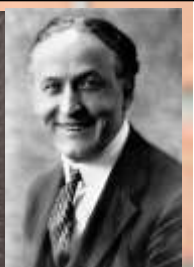
Our next presentation was Dean Gunnarson. He zoomed in from his "Morgue," which is part workshop and part museum. Dean did a tribute



to his recently departed friend and mentor James (The Amazing) Randi. Dean's presentation probably lasted a good long time, but I wasn't looking at the clock. After he fielded a few questions. Dean gave us a mini tour of his "morgue." Dean was the heir to Randi's collection and as such he showed off a set of Houdini thumb screws, a Houdini padlock, Duplicate keys made from a door hinge, and plaster casts of many jail locks that Randi had made. Dean may have spoken for quite a while, but as he is almost certainly Canada's hardest working escape artist, he had many more tales to tell. These would have to wait for another time. When asked about Randi's rivalry with Steve (Mr. Escape) Baker, Dean downplayed the rivalry. He pointed out that they were two very different men with two very different styles. Steve was far more prone to a loud, flashy in your face style, while Randi was the more methodical of the two.



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





Cliff repeated a presentation he had done for the UKEA zoom meeting which he paid tribute to the late Thomas Blacke. The video showed "The Gulag" escape in which ropes

wrapped around the back of the neck run through a solid pipe and hands are tied in front at the other end. This is very immobilizing, but Blacke was free in less than a second. Then Cliff showed off a Pastor Clyde creation that was similar, although the hands were pinned to the side of the tube by strong nylon rope. A chain and padlock held the whole business together. It was nice, but then Cliff pointed out that the concept was of unlimited potential and passed the lead to Chris (Fenyx Fyre) Campbell.

Chris showed a video of himself using a very similar set up that applied many of the same techniques and concepts.



Here he was reaching into the world's biggest bear trap to retrieve a candy cane while his hands were bound to neck in the "Gulag" fashion.

Chris followed up that amazing and entertaining piece with another amazing escape. This one involved handcuffs, and a piece of his proprietary equipment. With his life on the line Chris made the escape successfully.

Finally, Chris showed off his pump that shoots Windex through a needle into his nose and he must escape handcuffs before choking or drowning. Chris is one heck of a performer. The world better watch out for him with the pandemic is over.

Cliff took the floor back and talked about future plans. Apparently, he had a show booked at a theater that catered to a 20 something crowd and they asked for a more R-rated adult show. Cliff has never used profanity on stage in his life and so worked up an idea about a cheating husband getting trapped by an insane woman and having to escape before a bed turned into a mouse trap. He credited Arthur Coghlan with presenting the various and less obvious ways the big hoop chain escape could be used. First Cliff had South American Yadir Heden hold up the large hoop escape that really doesn't look all that formidable. Then Cliff held up his Steve Baker version, smaller, thinner and



looks more deceptive. Finally, he showed a U-bolt and nuts. This is available at any hardware store cheap and with chains attached (Cliff had those) will act just like the hoop escape, but in a far less obvious way. The volunteer who applies the chain, can be manipulated to doing it "right" just by the way the EA positions their hand.



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/>



Mentioning mouse trap's led to Todd Gardner, the Washington D.C. area escape artist and sideshow performer, doing a card

trick that involved snapping a mouse trap on his tongue and eventually finding a card in there as well. Todd also spoke about passion for the field and how there is far more motivation in play than money. There was general agreement as only a handful of those present made their living solely by performing. Todd spoke of earning "tens" of dollars while performing and Cliff agreed citing his experiences as a referee in pro-wrestling. Todd's devotion to his craft is strong, as he has flown great distances for short periods of time to perform.

This led to Alex Madson demonstrating a card move and talking about the psychology of audience manipulation and audience control.



After Alex' demonstration, Todd talked about audience control and talked about errors in getting put in a straitjacket. Apparently Monkey Dungeon, a company that caters more to bondage than escapes, makes products that do not stand up to the rigors an escape artist requires. Todd talked about a broken buckle turning into a hook and giving him a very hard time, but he got out. He further spoke of the psychology of making the escape look harder. Cliff demonstrated two meaningless



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

moves he does that make it look like he is having trouble. Cliff and Chris shared a common experience they both had in which a volunteer called up to apply a straitjacket turned out to be a psychiatric nurse. That must have been one heck of a pair of performances. Yadir Heden of Columbia showed off his beautiful straitjacket. He was separated from us by a language barrier, but some things don't need words. There are some YouTube videos of his work and he is one of us for sure.

Bruce Thomson took the floor and talked about his ideas and vision for the next live escape artist convention. Las Vegas should be the place as it has an easy access international airport, cheap hotel rooms, easy access meeting rooms, and plenty of entertainment. This convention is probably at least one or maybe two years off, but is still worth talking about. The last escape artist convention was in 2009, a full 11 years ago, and many of us remember the Cannon conventions fondly. There was talk about speakers, lectures, workshops and competitions that could happen at the event, as well as performances. I for one hope we can build up enough interest to make the convention a reality.



A few pairs of collectable handcuffs were shown and this brought the mostly silent John Cox to the forefront. John is a Houdinianist, and runs a very successful blog (advertised in this e-newsletter on page two) about Houdini.



John was clear that he is not a "cuff" man, but he does know most of the where and when regarding Houdini and all that was involved. Mark Lyons also joined in to talk about provenance and whether we can trust that valuable handcuffs are what they claim to be. There is plenty of fraud out there. Mark showed off some beautiful Houdini owned handcuffs and John filled in some details. They made a great team.



Britain's own Dan (Weasel Dandaw) Robinson brought the gathering to a close. He spoke of turning a common rubbish dustbin container on wheels into a water escape in an inspiring and crowd-pleasing way. He also shared some of his past exploits,

including being rousted by the police and told he could not do a specific pier jump he was planning. He just went to another pier and did it anyway.

As I said when I started this article, five hours had passed in a heartbeat. All those present agreed that there should be another gathering, by Zoom in the near future and live when we can.



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

Next Time On Zoom!

Next Zoom Gathering - Sheryl Garrett was talking with Peter Pensaert of Belgium and he voiced his disappointment at the hours of the gathering not working for him. Sheryl had a very simple but brilliant idea. Why not start the gathering at 9 am California time. That would be 12 noon on the east coast and 5 or 6 pm in Europe. We could easily meet for two or three hours before it got too late for anyone, at least anyone on the western hemisphere. I am thinking that is a great idea. Someone else who thought the idea was good was Allan Taylor of the UKEA. He has run a few successful UKEA gatherings on Zoom and he is fine with the idea of a joint meeting. Lets look for this in early February.



Since writing the above piece,

Update...

We will Gather on Saturday February 6th on Zoom. Your hosts will be Allan Taylor (UKEA) and Cliff Gerstman. (ACES) What time? Well 9 a.m. Pacific Time (California) Which is 12:00 noon on America's east coast, or 5 pm for our mates in the United Kingdom. What does that mean for those of you who are located in other areas? No idea, but it is easily looked up.

Sign-up to attend here: <https://fb.me/e/1pi474wWG>

Speakers Include: Jake Bullet, Dorothy Dietrich, Chris Gower, Stuart Burrell, Christopher Campbell, and Wolflock.

This is going to be an amazing Zoom meeting and not one to be missed.



Dorothy Dietrich: Interview Online.

What a treat. I found this recent interview (Dec 2020) by dumb luck while I was looking for something else and what an amazing interview it is. If you care to watch it, it is presented in its entirety here....

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0Xnas_FPDA&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR35y-rkPxaar0XjWjYzeNKMIqUja1PbW7eKzZBJPATIYt6wR78QxFTfKj4

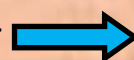
Mike Maione is a magician and entertainer based on Long Island in New York. He has taken it on himself to produce a



series of hour and a half shows featuring top level people in the word of magic. Here in episode #31 we get to hear from the first lady of Magic, Dorothy Dietrich.

Mike opens his show with a couple of humorous and unrelated vignettes. Then it is time for the main event. First he showed a pair of video clips. One was Dorothy doing an upside-down straitjacket escape with a burning rope. The second was her world famous bullet catch.

Mike's first question for Dorothy was why she performed the bullet catch, an effect that kills more magicians than any other.. Dorothy's answer came from an unfortunate place. Apparently, Even as recent as the 1980's, ladies were looked down upon by the magic community. Dorothy performed both the opening video stunts to win her place in the International Brotherhood of Magicians.





The Society of American Magicians were only willing to offer her an associate membership and the Magic Circle in

London was not even willing to offer that. Dorothy felt she had to claw her way into her place. She did that and clawed her way into history as well.

Dorothy feels the dumbest thing she ever did regarding the bullet catch was inviting her mother to come and watch her perform it..

She has officially performed the Bullet catch three times, but there was a fourth... She did a practice run at a college event in front of its president.

Mike then showed a series of photographs, and invited Dorothy to comment....

One photo showed a milk can. Dorothy had much to say about it. She pointed out that Houdini would often escape from it filled with milk, or sometimes beer. She didn't like the milk can escape because it messed up her hair, and she felt that a milk can was no longer relevant to today. Worse, if the can gets dented you can't do the escape, nor even really get a signal out that you are in trouble because of how pinned your arms are inside. Her quote



about not getting out was, "You look stupid and you look dead."

Dorothy shared an anecdote about Muhammad Ali.



Apparently she taught him some magic. However he was a terrible magician as due to his strong religious convictions, he had to expose every trick he did after performing it. She was careful to steer him toward magic that would suffer less from exposure.

Dorothy touted the Tony Curtis film "Houdini." she suggested that all the facts are wrong, but that it is a great period piece showing off what life looked like at the time of Houdini.

Why did the Houdini museum settle in Scranton Pennsylvania? Dorothy explained that the "Magic Townhouse" in New York City was the victim of extreme rent increases, and they simply could not afford to keep it open. They searched and searched and found a spot in Scranton, just a couple hours drive outside of New York with a very reasonable rent.



A long piece followed that covered Dorothy's efforts to replace the vandalized bust of Houdini on top of his ornate gravestone. The story is a long one that includes dealing with bureaucracy, and getting filmed by Steve Santini, a fellow escape artist and collector. The story ends with a hawk coming to visit the newly restored grave site who may or may not have been the spirit of Houdini..

Dorothy ended the interview with a poignant patter to a gypsy thread effect. The story was about her mother and very moving indeed. She says she uses that bit for school shows.

TIES and The chain letter take off our collective hats to salute our first lady of magic. You rock Dorothy!



Where are they?

Where are all the Escape Artists? I refuse to believe that the people that I have met and that I know through this publication, the WEAR events and the Conventions are all there are. I know there are more. Where are they?

I don't mind a magician who ends his show with an escape. They are fine and they really are welcome here, but I am asking about the other escape artists. Where are they?

Well, they are spread out across the world I suppose. Do you know them? If you do, can you give me contact info? Let me reach out to them and see if they want to read this newsletter, join in future Zoom meetings or even future conventions. I really think they deserve a chance to see what we are doing.

Have you worked with someone?

Have you trained someone?

Did you see a show?
(Live or online)

Even if someone gets nothing more than an opportunity to brag or showoff, that is still something. Maybe they can teach someone something, or maybe one of us can teach them something. With thoughts turning to a 2022 convention, we are

going to need these Escape Artists. Please let me know. Who they are.



Convention?



The current plans are fairly simple and straightforward, at least on paper. A 2022 convention to be held over a weekend in Las

Vegas. The convention would combine the efforts of Escape Artists, Handcuff Collectors and Sideshow performers. The three should fit in well together as evidenced by the success we have had combining those groups during online Zoom meetings.

While gathering via technology is great given the current quarantine conditions, it cannot stand up to true face to face convention. Those of you who attended one or more of the Cannon's conventions in the 2000's will know what I mean.

I mean just imagine, the lectures, the competitions, the performances, the things to see, the material to buy, and best of all the new friends to make!



We will try to keep the cost as low as possible, and Las Vegas is known for its ease of flying in and out of.

Do you have ideas for events that you would like to see at a convention? Let us know and it could happen. Let's lick this pandemic, get things

back on track, and show each other what we've got!

