I just picked up this new book from Erin Callahan. I enjoyed it cover to cover and read it through in almost one sitting. I will start by saying I give this delightful book two thumbs up. Ms Callahan has done a fantastic job of capturing the essence and spirit of several different aspects of real teenage life as shown in this book.

Who should read this book? Well, escape artists for one. Another group who will like it are fans of “coming of age” stories. A third group who will enjoy the book are those who like reading about true-life high school experiences.

While the book is a work of fiction and does not claim to be anything else, it does a fine job of presenting what certainly is happening in schools today.
and what has been happening in teen-age lives for a very long time.

Mattie is taught the fine art of lock picking. There is no magic here. This is done by rote practice and work. Truth is it takes hours of practice to master any physical skill and we are presented with a fast learner, but still someone who needs to practice. She does not master the skill overnight; this makes the story far more plausible and believable.

While we follow Mattie’s summer and senior year of high school, she performs four escapes; most of which rely on her lock picking skills. Even her straitjacket escape has a pair of locks involved that she must pick to be free. One of the best parts of the escapes is that Ms. Callahan does a wonderful job of building tension and real fear. I felt the fear Mattie was feeling as I read the adventure. We see how easy it can be to get distracted. Nothing seriously goes wrong during the escapes. But we do see a teen-age girl with an incredibly strong need to focus on what she is doing, more than once losing her concentration and almost paying for it. The book has some very believable sub plots running through the adventure. We deal with dating, friendship, college acceptance, college drop outs, homosexuality, teen-drinking, and teens vs parents in the power struggle to grow up. All of these can realistically be experienced in a typical high school setting, and all are handled well. There was one sub plot that was left unresolved. I would have liked to see it wrapped up, but perhaps Ms. Callahan has other intentions for it.

The Art of Escape is certainly rated “R” for language and adult theme. At first I wondered if that was really necessary, but as I read through I realized it was part of the characters as well as part of real high school students’ way of life. The book certainly works and presents itself with strong realism.

I believe that this book could be the inspiration for our next upcoming generation of escape artists, and I would love to see that happen. The teacher in me is always looking to train and guide our young performers. One thing I wish was included was a disclaimer. Mattie performs three escapes that could easily have ended in death. Someone messing around without guidance could come to serious life-threatening grief. Don’t try this at home kids, find a teacher if you want to explore the world of the escape artist.

Thank you Ms. Callahan for a subject well covered and a job well done. Two thumbs up!
TCL: Firstly, you label yourself a writer of “Young Adult” fiction. What do you consider a young adult? Is there an age range, or some other way of measuring maturity?

EC: Though I wish I could take credit for coining the term Young Adult, it was actually a few NYC public librarians who first started using it back in the 1960s to refer to books that were aimed at teens. Today, Young Adult (or “YA”) is generally targeted at readers from age thirteen to twenty-ish, and stars characters who also fall within that age range. Though some stats indicate that more adults than teens read YA these days, which explains why it’s become such a massive force in the book world.

I would say that my book is generally appropriate for age fourteen and up, though it’s really up to parents what books they think their child is ready for.

But there is, of course, a story here. When I was about five or six, I saw Princess Tenko perform a water tank escape on the show That’s Incredible! and it basically blew my mind. The image of her peering out of the tank at the crowd is burned into my brain. So when I was batting around ideas for a novel, I kept coming back to this image of a teenage girl performing an aquarium escape.

TCL: What actual escape artists have you seen perform live or on live television?

EC: In addition to Princess Tenko, I watched a lot of footage of Dorothy Dietrich when I was doing research for the book. Sadly, I’ve never seen a live escape act. Maybe someday!

TCL: Have you actually seen the Wil Wheaton Houdini movie that plays a strong role in the story? What did you think of it as a film?

"Wild about Harry"
John Cox”Houdini web site
www.wildabouthoudini.com
**EC:** I saw it as a kid and have never forgotten it, though that has probably less to do with Houdini and more to do with my mad crush on Wil Wheaton. :) I mean, it’s classic 80s Disney cheese, but it’s the kind of thing that I can totally see bringing on an obsession with Houdini and escapology. Fun fact: You can actually watch the movie on YouTube – but only the Spanish version!

**TCL:** You consulted with escape artist Danny Hunt in preparation for writing this book. What is the next thing you would like to learn about escaping, or are you done with it now that the book is done?

**EC:** Great question. I don’t have any immediate plans to write another book about escapology, but I’m obviously fascinated by it, and I love that writing this book has led to some interactions with actual escape artists.

**TCL:** Of the four stage escapes presented in the story which one would be your favorite to watch? Only one of them is NOT potentially life threatening. What are your actual real world feelings about a teen-ager taking such risks?

**EC:** Oh gosh – I think Mattie’s first aquarium escape where she sees Will in the crowd would be my favorite to watch because it’s so emotionally fraught. But you’re right – these are VERY dangerous escapes and I intentionally saved the one I see as the most dangerous until the end of the book, after the main character has turned eighteen.

I have a young daughter and I have to admit that if she magically turned seventeen tomorrow and told me she wanted to become an escape artist, I’d have serious misgivings. But if she was really determined I think I’d try to find a reliable mentor for her.

**TCL:** One of the strongest points of this story is how real all your main characters feel. I found myself believing them and that made it easy to cheer for them. Mattie, your protagonist, is a very pleasant, but normally flawed teen-ager. How much of yourself did you put into her? What other sources did you use to create your characters?

**EC:** Thank you so much – this is the kind of thing authors love to hear. There’s a little bit of me in Mattie as there is in all of my characters, though I think the character most like me is Mattie’s mom. I’m actually closer in age to the parents in the book than I am to the kids. Will is very loosely based on my real life best friend, Troy Gardner, who is also a writer.
I spend a lot of time thinking about my characters before I start writing and typically write out character sketches full of details that often don’t even make it into the book. But it helps to have it all in my head when I’m writing.

**TCL:** When you wrote this book, were you planning or hoping to inspire young readers to aspire to a career or hobby as an escape artist? I noticed there is no warning in the book cautioning young adults not to try Mattie’s stunts. Does it worry you that some might try?

**EC:** Because I started writing this book years ago, long before I had a literary agent, the thought of actual teenagers reading it seemed like a pipedream. But inspiring a new generation of potential magicians / escape artists would be an amazing side effect. I truly hope that any readers (adults or teens) who are seriously interested in pursuing escapology as a hobby/career look for help instead of trying any very dangerous stunts at home. Use your heads, kids! I’m sure there are lots of experienced escape artists out there who would be willing to serve as mentors. But even with help, it’s an extremely risky hobby.

**TCL:** If your book were made into a film as written, it would be rated “R” for the amount of profane language used as well as some adult theme. Would you tone the language down to make a “PG-13” film, or do you think that would destroy the feel of the story?

**EC:** Ha! One of the things I love most about YA these days is that almost nothing is off-limits, including curse words. But I would be okay with toning them down for a PG-13 rating. I think a good screenwriter could capture all of Mattie and Will’s snark with less F-bombs.

**TCL:** There is no “on-screen” sex in this story, but there is a strong theme of it throughout the book. How do you feel adults should support young people as they search for, find, and sometimes struggle with their sexual identity?
EC: Wow, this is a huge question. Because I would never profess to be an expert on this, I’m going to say that unconditional love and frank discussions about safe sex and consent go a long way, and then name drop some resources: [http://mykidisgay.com/resources/](http://mykidisgay.com/resources/) [https://lgbtrc.usc.edu/parents/](https://lgbtrc.usc.edu/parents/)

TCL: I noticed that the four parents that appear in the book stay mostly in the background and are there as supporting characters or as complications. What do you see the correct role of a parent being if a teenager takes up an extreme and potentially dangerous hobby?

EC: *spoiler alert* There’s a reason Mattie doesn’t tell her parents about what she’s been up to for the summer. I just couldn’t stomach it. Parenting is complicated. Can I go back to writing now? :)

TCL: Where do you see Mattie’s life taking her as she finishes college and begins a career?

EC: I see her settling into herself over time, but I really hope she continues to pursue escapology. I think it’s so important to hang onto your interests and core pieces of your identity as you get older and take on more responsibilities. I can totally see her becoming a mentor to another plucky young escape artist.

TCL: Will there be a sequel? Mattie’s adventures in college?

EC: Maybe yes! I have batted around the idea of writing a companion novel that takes place when the characters are in college. Mattie and Will will make appearances, but I think I’d focus primarily on some of the secondary characters, possibly Frankie and Betsy.

The Art of Escaping is available at most bookstores and online at Amazon.com

Available at Amazon

Stuart Burrell: Escape Podcast Episode 23

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjf8zxeboE&feature=youtu.be
For IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Forty-two years ago the last World Championship of Escape Artists took place in Las Vegas, Nevada. The winner of that first championship was Charlie Myrick. There has not been another competition since. NOW after 42 years in June of 2019 the World Championship Escape Competition comes to Colon, Michigan - THE Magic Capital Of The World! Hosted by The FAB Magic Company and Charlie Myrick, competition will be open to all practicing escape artists of all ages. To be considered for the championship all competitors must submit a bio and audition DVD of their act and performance history and postmarked no later than August 31st, 2018. All submissions need to be sent to:

Escape Competition, c/o FAB Magic Company, PO Box 483, Colon, MI 49040.

After a review of all submissions all competitors selected will be notified by October 31st, 2018 with notice and competition rules and regulations. There is NO entrance FEE. Cash Prizes will Be Awarded!

This month we find Erin Callahan at the Houdini Museum with Dick and Dorothy. She did a reading and book signing. Ms. Callahan really enjoyed the experience. She counts Dorothy Dietrich as one of her personal role models as well as one of Mattie’s for the book. Ms. Callahan paid tribute to several female escape artists in her talk. Here’s hoping for more of Mattie’s future adventures.

Dorothy Dietrich, Erin Callahan and Dick Brookz

A great tribute site to the amazing David De-Val

http://www.davidde-val.com/
See and Hear Erin Callahan interviewed at the Houdini Museum book signing with Dorothy Dietrich and Dick Bookz

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XISofUg6n6U
Hey Fellow Escapees...
Do You Own a Straight Jacket???
For a Limited Time I am Offering my Comedy Jacket Routine The Houdini’s Last Escape without a Jacket...

So if you want to have one of the Best Comedy Escape routines to add to your already funny Jacket Routine here’s what you get... DVD with full routine and a few funny variations, The Music that makes it Funny (e mailed MP3 or snail mailed Cd), written Directions and Special Gag Sheets (These can be e mailed as well)

Plus performing rights and personal help from me to make it your own....

The Houdini’s Last Escape is the Vanishing Banana of the Escape World...

I have performed it as my closer for 20 plus years and received many Standing O's

Others have adapted it to other Escapes like Chains and Rope Ties...

So PM me for Special Price or More info...
Thanks BTMoore

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.

The Magic Nook
www.magicnook.com

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

"Without a Key" for all your lock picking needs
http://www.withoutakey.co.uk/

This site is well worth the time to study if you want to learn about lock picking.
http://www.lockpickguide.com/
It’s an exciting, unusual, historical, place that any Magician would love to meander through, study the pictures, books and paraphernalia that is and was Harry Houdini. Nestled near the Pocono Mountains in Scranton, Pennsylvania, is this enchanting place…… the Houdini Museum.

The two creative magicians who founded and developed this unique Museum are Dorothy Dietrich and Dick Brookz. More about them, later. The items that they’ve collected regarding Houdini are displayed beautifully. During a tour, these two talented and experienced Magicians explain and relate stories that are alluring. There are posters of the movies that Houdini appeared in and even wrote. He starred in five major, silent films, as well as, doing fifteen weekly serials for the movies. At the end of each episode, Houdini was tied up in water or hanging upside down. These thrilling stunts kept the audiences coming back week after week to see ‘if’ he escaped and lived! This was eventually made into a full length movie called “The Master Mystery.” Rare film footage can be seen at the Houdini Museum. There is a poster advertising his movie and another poster from the 1890’s with his image and name promoting the Welch Brothers Circus with which he traveled and performed throughout the Northeast…. including Scranton.

As he became known, Martin Beck, (a major producer of shows in New York theaters,) sent Houdini a collect telegram offering him a job for $60 with the promise ‘to see the act and probably make a proposition for next year.’ This telegram is one of the memorabilia in the Houdini Museum. Houdini lived in New York and the Parent Assembly of Society of American Magicians is proud that Harry Houdini was President for ten years until his death. He has the SAM crest on his grave site.

The Houdini grave site at Machpelah Cemetery in New York, entombs his entire family, except for his wife, Beatrice, (Bess.) There is a place for her but her family wanted her buried in their family plot. Although there had been a bust of him, vandals had destroyed it. Dorothy Dietrich and Dick Brookz were determined to replace the bust. It took years and much, much money to find a way to create a bust that could be attached and irremovable from the tomb. The impossible was achieved and after much effort to convince the cemetery management of the importance of this effort, Dorothy and Dick found a way to create the bust and attach it to his tomb.

If you are interested in occult escapology, you want S. Rob!  
https://www.srob.co.uk/
Dorothy Dietrich and Dick Brookz used to live and work in New York City. There, they developed and owned The Magic Towne House. Now, they are the curators and performers at the Houdini Museum in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Dorothy has performed as a magician since her teenage years. She is recorded in “Ripley’s Believe It or Not,” for doing the (in)famous ‘Bullet Catch.’ She is probably the first women to do the Straight Jacket Escape. ... and suspended upside down as well! In her magic act at the Museum, she uses eight doves, a rabbit, a duck, and two poodles and even floats an audience member on stage. She is an accomplished Magician with an extensive history well worth reading. I urge you to see her website.... dorothydietrich.com or read about her on Wikipedia.

Dick Brookz, “Bravo, the Great,” is considered one of the world’s foremost experts on Houdini along with Dorothy. And with her, he is a leading collector of Houdiniana. He is often called upon to advise researchers for books and movies. Dick has performed and been a magic advisor on numerous television shows and has performed all over the world. He’s been the opening act for Jack Jones, Jerry Vale, Neil Sedaka, Bobby Darin and many others. Read more interesting and remarkable details at Wikipedia.

In the Houdini Museum’s collection is a copy of the book, “A Magician Among the Spirits,” written by Houdini. When you visit this remarkable Museum, you’ll see in the front cover of this book a hand-written note by Houdini which states, “My brain is the key that sets me free.”

In the Navvy from S. Rob

According to S. Rob, a Navvy, is a British term from many years ago. It meant someone who laid railroad tracks for a living.

S. Rob suggests that a way that Navvy’s may have self policed themselves was to take someone who stepped out of line, and tie him to his implement of work; a shovel. The point is made that this may not be the truth, but in entertainment, who really cares anyway. The escape suggested in this book is neither the Gypsy Tie nor is it Grandma’s necklace, but it could have elements of both. Once we get through the escape and the safety warnings, we are down to the simple fact that this escape is tied to a shovel escape. So like many of S. Rob’s escape plans, the key here is in the window dressing. You are setting a tone and using patter to enthrall the audience.

Next in the book are the suggestions on how to bring the occult into the escape. You can do this or not as you choose. I do think that a “civil war era” magic show is a viable setting. Enjoy.