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Las Vegas "Not a Convention" Coming up

On the weekend of June 8th and 9th Las Vegas will be the site of the world’s first, International Escapologist (not) Convention!

Come to Las Vegas for the weekend and meet David De-Val’s daughter Rebecca!

It is too early to predict what other events may happen besides a nice dinner and EA sharing. Probably some stories, demos and showing off equipment or mementos. This will largely depend on who comes and who has what available.

Hoping to be able to set up an escape show to watch and also hoping for a good turn out.

The editor of The Chainletter will be there... Of course it will be way better if you are there too.
For more than a decade, Kristen “Lady Houdini” Johnson has made her living as an escape artist. She wriggles out of shackles in a glass box filled with water. She escapes from a straitjacket while hanging from a crane. Her stunts routinely leave fans in shock and delight.

But about a year ago, she was the one left shocked, in a mangled car on a road outside the South Florida Fairgrounds. The horrific accident changed the lives of Johnson and her magician husband Kevin Ridgeway, who calls it “the biggest escape we’ve ever done.”

And after a long recovery from critical injuries, particularly to Ridgeway, who remained in a coma for five weeks at St. Mary’s Medical Center, the couple returns to the South Florida Fair this year to triumphantly perform the show they never got to do.

They are using their near-tragedy to expose the dangers of distracted driving, which according to the official police report contributed to their crash.

“We had a collision,” Johnson says, standing near the crushed seat of the BMW that Ridgeway was sitting in during the accident. “You can’t (make) an impact without a collision.”

The crash left Johnson with several broken ribs and a punctured lung, among other injuries. Ridgeway lost a kidney. But after extensive rehabilitation, the two were back onstage and with a new mission in less than a year. “We do something challenging every day,” she says. “This is just another challenge.”

Kristen Johnson was raised in show business - her mother Sunny Johnson is a veteran clown. But her own road to the spotlight wound first through corporate America.

After graduating from the University of North Carolina, she worked in that state’s Research Triangle, but moved to Indiana, where her parents had settled, when her mother was diagnosed with cancer and needed help with her business.
That’s when Johnson met magician Ridgeway, who “picked me up at a home and garden show,” she says, laughing. When they started dating, she says her mother’s first reaction was “‘Hey! A young man to do birthday parties!’”

The couple, who have been married 17 years and are now based in Atlanta, began developing their act and worked up a strenuous schedule, traveling about 300 times a year. Johnson notes that unlike many married couples or families in the business, they retained their own last names because “I didn’t want to be ‘The Ridgeway Family’ and have people be like ‘Isn’t that nice that her husband put her in the act! He’ll keep her till she gets fat.’”

Not likely. Lady Houdini isn’t just an accessory to the show - she is the show. Of all of the derring-do in the act, the showstopper is the Water Torture Cell, which she began doing in 2003.

Established by escape legend Harry Houdini himself, Johnson does the master one better, becoming the first person to do the trick in full view of the audience rather than have the box dramatically covered while she gets out.

A $10,000 challenge, offering that amount to anyone who catches her cheating, still stands. She’s also now done the trick 1,000 times more than Houdini.

There are dangers. On her website, Ridgeway recalls the three times he was “horrified” when Johnson couldn’t escape from the water cell, and had to be removed: “Twice, she suffered hypoxic seizures and blacked out, the third she could not pick the lock inside the lid.”

After all that, they never expected their biggest challenge would happen offstage.

2017 was going to be their big year at the South Florida Fair. Johnson and Ridgeway were doing the Lady Houdini act for the first time here. They’d been in the area for days, when about 24 hours before their first show, the couple drove to a nearby gym. They were almost back to the fairgrounds when they were hit at the corner of Belvedere Road and Sansbury’s Way, right near the fairgrounds entrance.

As a result of the accident, engineers investigated that intersection, which had a traffic camera that was not turned on at the time, and found it to have an accident rate that “certainly exceeded what we find acceptable,” county engineer George Webb told the Palm Beach Post at the time.
The lights have since been changed at that intersection, Johnson says. No one was cited in the accident, but the official report mentioned that the driver, a teenage girl, had exhibited distracted and negligent driving, Ridgeway says.

He has no memory of the accident itself, but awoke five weeks later at St. Mary’s to face a gruesome litany of injuries. Johnson suffered a concussion, broken ribs and separated shoulder. “I never had a concussion before. I’d cracked, not broken, some ribs and chipped a tooth, and had third-degree rope burns on my hands,” Johnson says. “I had chewed-up skin as a general rule. But nothing like this.”

Her husband’s condition was more serious with a broken leg, a fractured pelvis, eight broken ribs, a deflated lung and one lost kidney. After Ridgeway awoke, he would spend another three weeks at the West Palm Beach hospital, which he and Johnson returned to recently “because we had to thank them. They did a great job.” They also thank Quantum House, where they stayed while Ridgeway was released from the hospital but was still being treated.

During that recovery, the two survived financially thanks to savings from previous shows in that season, as well as about $18,000 raised by a GoFundMe crowd funding page started by a friend. Ridgeway wasn’t released from the hospital until April, and then set off to recover, including intensive physical therapy. The process left Ridgeway “feeling like an old man,” but determined to get better. The two missed seven months of work. As you might imagine, people whose daily jobs involve daring feats of wonder don’t relax easily, and so they set up their first post-accident show for August 1, 2017 in Wyoming, a schedule Johnson readily admits was “aggressive.”

And risky. Johnson, whose job depends on being able to hold her breath underwater while escaping a glass container, “had a punctured lung, because I broke ribs in the accident,” she says. “I could hold my breath, but there was pain involved. I had done some pool training, but my best stat (for holding her breath) was three minutes.”

Too bad that the trick was estimated to take about five minutes. But they are determined daredevils, even though she admits that neither of them have the stamina they used to. They just kept working at it. They call it “our new normal.”
While fans were thrilled to have them back, those closer to them were concerned. Ridgeway recalls a call from one of his uncles, who said “I was really against you guys coming back so soon,” until he watched the Will Smith movie “Concussion,” about the NFL’s chronic issue with head injuries, and related it to the couple’s new crusade against distracted driving.

“He (repeated) the quote from (the movie) that says, ‘When you have truth, the thing you are told you cannot do is the thing you must do,’” Ridgeway says. “I got chills.”

As much as they love the dangerous aspects of their act, they believe the most important part is right before the finale. Ridgeway talks about how many shows they do a year and explains that “we missed seven months.” And then reveals the mangled car seat. “I was seated right here,” he tells audiences. “Put the phone down.”

He motions to two giant color photos of him used in the show. One, taken two days before the accident, shows a smiling, muscular Ridgeway flexing for the camera. The second is of him frail and more than 60 pounds lighter.

“We want to have a positive impact,” Johnson says. “If we can stop one person from messing around with their radio, or talking on the phone, we will.”

And that seems to be happening. At “every single show, someone comes up and tells us about someone they know who had survived, or may have not, this type of accident,” Ridgeway says. “And sometimes they bring people back to see it. We’ve come full circle.

“I can’t go back and change anything,” Ridgeway says. “But I can use what happened to me to save someone’s life.”

*According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), at least 3,500 deaths in 2015 were attributed to distracted driving.
*The NHSTA defines distracted driving as “any activity that diverts attention from driving, including talking or texting on your phone, eating and drinking, talking to people in your vehicle, fiddling with the stereo, entertainment or navigation system—anything that takes your attention away from the task of safe driving.”
*The Florida Department of Transportation has instituted an anti-distracted driving campaign called “Put It Down.”
*Texting and driving is illegal in the state of Florida.
*Injuries associated with texting rose 45 percent in Palm Beach County as of 2016.
Our mate S. Rob is at it again. This time he has come up with a book of rituals to be performed to the Roman gods while doing escapes.

In the book Roman Occult Escapology, Mr. Rob starts out with a simple Keller tie, and then proceeds to demonstrate what can be done with the escape in terms of summoning Roman gods to aid in the appropriate ritual. This seems to be a topic that Mr. Rob has studied well.

In this book, the role of the gatekeeper falls to Janus, the Roman god of transition. This might be a good choice, as Janus is known for looking forward and backward at the same time. He looks to the past as well as the future.

Without going into specific rituals, that you can certainly find in the book if you care to read it, I am reminded of a lesson given by a Philosophy Professor at Queens College in New York.

He suggested that the reason that the world is so messed up is that people no longer pray correctly. In the old days, if you were angry, you prayed to the god of war. If you were looking for love, then Venus was the deity you wanted etc. I do not comment on whether he was right or wrong. I leave that to those more experienced with comparative religion than I.

I don’t know if any Escapologist out there would set up a show with toga clad dancing assistants and an ancient Roman motif, but certainly one could. What is the value to doing this? Well, Greek and Roman mythology is well known and well studied. Many people are very familiar with the stories and legends surrounding these entities and so you’ll get instant buy in.

There is something else that might add to the show done in such a style. It has long been believed by scholars that the ancient Greeks and Romans had a version of the “Peppers Ghost” illusion available to them. This combined with the use of a bull horn was used to show an angry god growing to large size in front of someone.

In any case what ever you do with it, it does make for an interesting read and could make for an interesting show. Pick it up if you like, S. Rob’s books are available on Amazon.com.
Performers are always looking for something unique to add variety to their shows and The Thumb Tie fits the bill perfectly. It's an unusual piece with strong magic and plenty of room for you to inject your personality and style. In this lesson, Dan teaches you multiple methods and a wide range of presentations.

First, you'll learn Ten Ichi's original (and still baffling) thumb tie with a few of Dan's surprising touches for unexpected fun.

Then, Dan shows you a number of variations for the tying procedure so you'll be able to find one that's perfect for you.

Next, Harlan teaches you how I employ a devious (and slightly dangerous) method from Tarbell himself to defeat a truly secure tying procedure.

Plus, he goes way beyond the standard routine outlined in the original lesson by including modern presentations and methods, starting with a mixture of pickpocketing and escape that's so much easier than it looks.

And, don't worry everyone leaves with their own belongings, plus a little something for their trouble.

Then, Dan use common garden variety twist-ties to comically capture a couple, steal one away momentarily, and bring them back closer than ever.

And if that's not big enough, check out this intimidating guillotine escape gone wrong. Who has two thumbs and gets away unscathed? This guy.

And finally, an impromptu, emergency method requires nothing more than a couple of rubber bands to re-create the puzzling penetrations of the original.

So, when you're looking for something different to spice up your show, consider the surprisingly strong Thumb Tie in any one of its memorable variations.

http://www.lockpickguide.com/
Ok, so that was the blurb from the Penguin Magic website about this DVD. Having purchased and watched the DVD myself, I have to agree with everything that has been said. I will also say that I enjoyed the DVD very much. Did I learn a lot? Maybe not, at least not from the first 40 minutes or so.

The first 40 minutes of this over two hour DVD is Dan Harlan going over lesson 53 from Tarbell’s book. He shows the thumb tie in five or so different variations, and shows it in performance; filmed by Penguin in his studio. He does an excellent job. A beginner escape artist could learn how to do a thumb tie presentation from this DVD. A seasoned pro could pick up some small nuances that could be added into an act very effectively.

The DVD really begins to shine after the basic lessons and performances are done. Harlan has included on the DVD several bonus lessons and routines all revolving around the thumb tie.

Probably the best thumb tie escape is not the escape anyone would have expected, but rather a guillotine escape where the thumbs remain tied, but the guillotine passes right through the performer’s hands. For the seasoned professional escape artist, this guillotine probably costs about $60 or so to build, so get the DVD and go for it.

Dan Harlan has one more escape related DVD in the Tarbell series that I will review next month. For those that are not aware, Dan has announced that he will be creating one DVD for each lesson in the Tarbell books all the way through book eight. Penguin sells the DVD’s for $20 each, but they have a special in which you can get ten Dan Harlan, Tarbell DVDs for $100…. That’s ten dollars each. The editor thinks that each DVD he has seen is well worth the price.
Gold Star Films and Signature Films have announced that Ron Shelton is set to direct *Escape Artist*.

Shelton and Al Reinert wrote the script to the feature that depicts the true-life events that led Ed “Hacksaw” Jones to break out of 14 prisons and become the first person to ever be put on the FBI’s 10 Most Wanted list without ever committing a violent crime. *Escape Artist* centers on Jones, who after being falsely sentenced to ten years of hard labor in a chain gang, escapes and begins a life on the run as a master escape artist. The charming and charismatic man becomes a folk hero to many as he continually re-invents himself until the FBI finally catches up with him.

Shelton said: “I got to know Ed well when he rented a house in the Hollywood Hills from me after I moved out. Ed was the greatest tenant in history - the bed was always made with the sheets tucked in without a wrinkle. The house was spotless. He changed the locks so even I couldn’t get in. And he paid six months in advance - all cash!” “We’d sit around drinking his beloved Chivas Regal and the stories would start flowing till the bottle was drained. Though much of his life was stolen from him by a cruel and flawed criminal justice system, he managed to live a thousand wondrous lives with the time he had.”

Gold Star specializes in films with budgets ranging from $5-$25m, and frequently films in southern Louisiana to utilize state tax credits. The company produced Halle Berry drama *Kidnap*, and *Maggie* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Abigale Breslin.

London-based Signature Films most recently produced Scott Mann’s action film *Final Score*, which stars Dave Batista and Pierce Brosnan, and last year’s British action hit *The Hatton Garden Job* starring Matthew Goode and Stephen Moyer.

Tufaro said: “Ron is an incredibly talented director with a track record of hit films with unique points of view. His personal way of storytelling will add so much to this story about a man who faced and overcame insurmountable obstacles.”

Goldberg added: “It’s so rare to find a story as fascinating and compelling as that of Ed Jones. I read the script and immediately thought, ‘This can’t be true.’ Ron Shelton has done a phenomenal job bringing this story to life, and we are honored and excited to work with him.”

The film is slated to be shot in the greater New Orleans, Louisiana area.