



HARRY HOUDINI

The Legend
of the World's
**GREATEST
ESCAPE
ARTIST**





“The magic of stage illusionists is not just a trick. Yes, there's a secret, but it's not a trick. You know, 'trick' kind of belittles it. There's a secret, there's a method behind it.”

-David Copperfield

Houdini...

Except for the legendary Merlin of King Arthur's Court, no other name so conjures up the realm of magic.



Capturing Popular Imagination

Few performers have ever captured the public imagination like Harry Houdini. From his breakthrough in 1899 to his death in 1926, Houdini was one of the world's most popular entertainers, a true star of stage and screen.



Escaping Reality

Time and again, his escapes from seemingly impossible predicaments thrilled audiences, who found in him a metaphor for their own lives, an affirmation of the human capacity to overcome adversity. Escapism in both senses of the word.

The World's Greatest!

In 1912 Harry Houdini was lowered into New York's East River in a crate wrapped in chains. The crowd of spectators gasped; reporters pulled out their stop watches. Houdini was out in less than a minute. The resulting media blitz established him forever as the world's greatest escape artist.



On stage, Houdini subjected himself to the Water Torture Cell, being buried alive, and other perils of his own design. Throughout his rise from Hungarian immigrant to international star, Houdini confronted humanity's greatest fears entrapment, pain, death -- and emerged victorious.

Getting to Know You...

But while nearly everyone is familiar with Houdini's stage persona, his little-known personal life is equally revealing.

Bouncing Baby Boy

Often considered one of the greatest escape artists and magicians of all time Houdini was born on March 24, 1874 in Budapest, Hungary as Ehrich Weiss. He was the fifth son of a very poor rabbi.



A Whole New World

The family came to the United States soon after Ehrich's birth, eventually settling in New York City. In New York, Harry Houdini worked as a messenger and as a cutter in a garment center sweat shop, Richter & Sons, a tie factory to help support his family.

Flying with the Greatest of Ease

He was introduced to magic by a friend (they saw the Chinese rings performed) and they practiced small tricks with cards and coins, and cups and balls (his first trick) but the secrets of rope escapes fascinated Ehrich the most.

He made his public début as a 9-year-old trapeze artist, calling himself “Ehrich, the prince of the air”.

A New Name

Weiss became a professional magician and began calling himself “Harry Houdini” because he was heavily influenced by the French magician Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin, and his friend Jack Hayman told him, wrongly, that in French, adding an “i” to Houdin would mean “like Houdin” the great magician.

Off to a Not-so-great Start



With his new name, Houdini joined his brother in a small magic act. At the outset, Houdini's magic career resulted in little success. He performed in dime museums and sideshows, and even doubled as "the Wild Man" at a circus. Houdini focused initially on traditional card tricks. At one point, he billed himself as the "King of Cards". But he soon began experimenting with escape acts.

Making a Bess of Things

In 1893, while performing with his brother “Dash” at Coney Island as “The Houdini Brothers”, Harry met a fellow performer, eighteen year old Wilhelmina Beatrice (Bess) Rahner, whom he married.

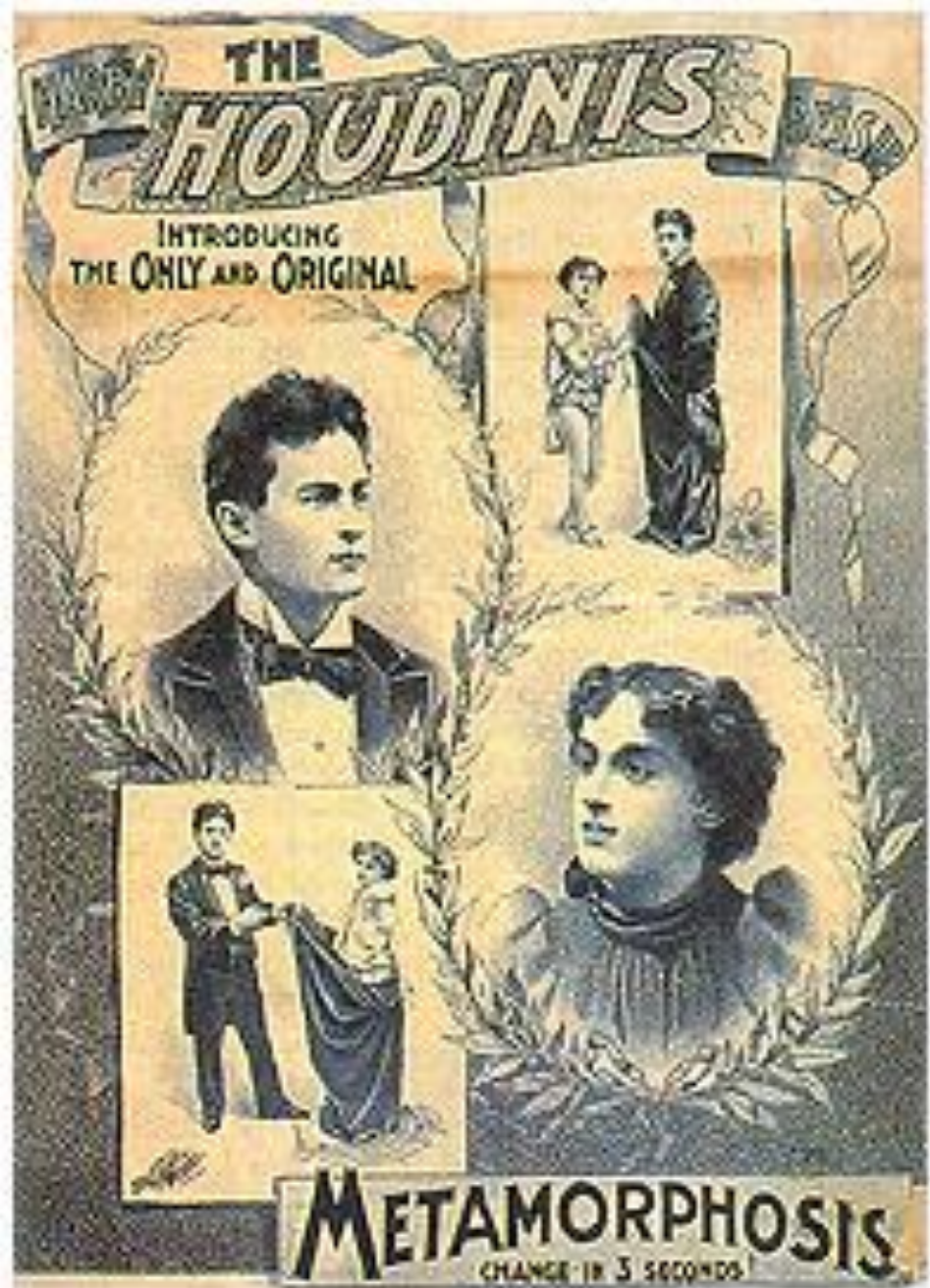
Bess replaced Dash in the act, which became known as “The Houdinis.” and for the rest of Houdini’s performing career, Bess would work as his stage assistant.



Rough Patch

While they gained some notice with a trunk escape they called "The Metamorphosis," life on the dime museum circuit was grueling for the young couple.

Though barely twenty-five, in 1898 Houdini was so tired of it he thought seriously about quitting.



The Ranches - Arizona
Greatest Comedy Act.



1st Professional Picture 1894

1st YEAR MARRIED LIFE.





The Big Break!

Houdini's "big break" came in 1899 when he met manager Martin Beck in rural Woodstock, Illinois. Impressed by Houdini's handcuffs act, Beck advised him to concentrate on escape acts and booked him on the Orpheum vaudeville circuit.

Harry Houdini developed a range of stage magic tricks, many of them based on what became known after his death as escapology.

Escapology?

Escapology is the practice of escaping from restraints or other traps. Escapologists escape from handcuffs, straitjackets, cages, coffins, steel boxes, barrels, bags, burning buildings, fish-tanks and other dangers, often in combination.



Breaking Free!

- Houdini was genuinely skilled in techniques such as lock-picking and escaping straitjackets, but also made full use of the range of conjuring techniques, including fake equipment and working with individuals planted in the audience.
- Within months, he was performing at the top vaudeville houses in the country.



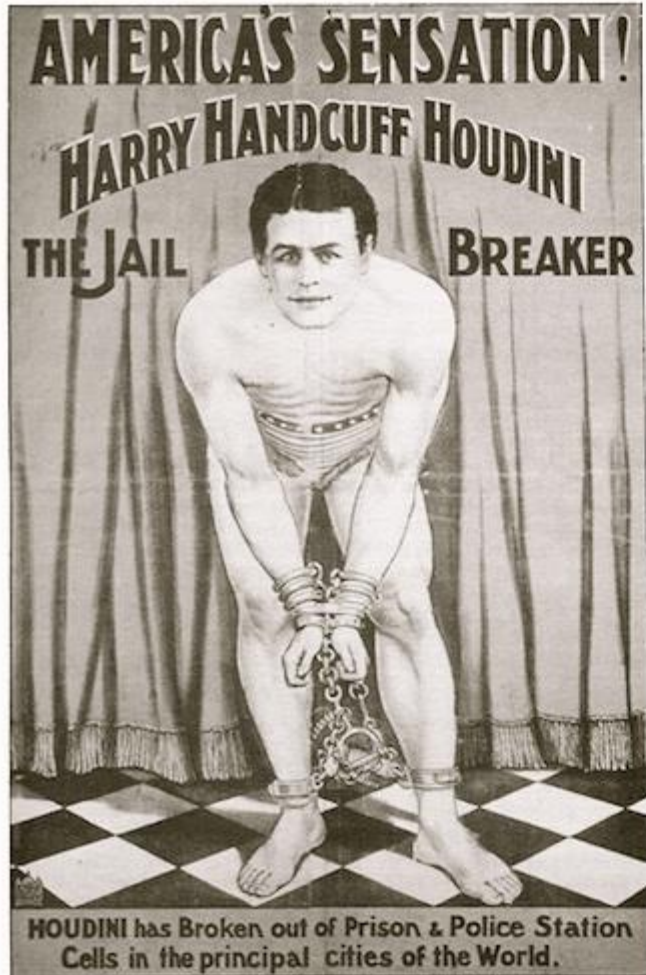
The Big Leagues Across the Pond

But as wonderful as this was, no amount of success in America, which had barely begun to emerge from Europe's cultural shadow (everyone thought the best things were there), could compare with acceptance across the Atlantic.

You hadn't really made it until you'd made it big in Europe!



Crossing Over



In 1900, already bickering with his manager Martin Beck (only a year after meeting him), he arranged his own tour of Europe, where he would spend the bulk of the next five years.



A Tricky Introduction

After some days of unsuccessful interviews in London, Houdini managed to interest Dundas Slater, then manager of the Alhambra Theatre, when he gave a demonstration of escape from handcuffs at Scotland Yard, and succeeded in baffling the police so effectively that he was booked to do shows at the Alhambra Theatre for six months!



The Handcuff King

Houdini became widely known as “The Handcuff King.” He toured England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Russia. In each city, Houdini would challenge local police to restrain him with shackles and lock him in their jails and he would try to escape.

Sold Out Show!

In many of these challenge escapes, Houdini would first be stripped nude and searched to see if he had any tricks or keys up his sleeves.

At his performances, hundreds of people were turned away because there wasn't enough room; on stage, the short, muscular star created a frenzy with his daring stunts.

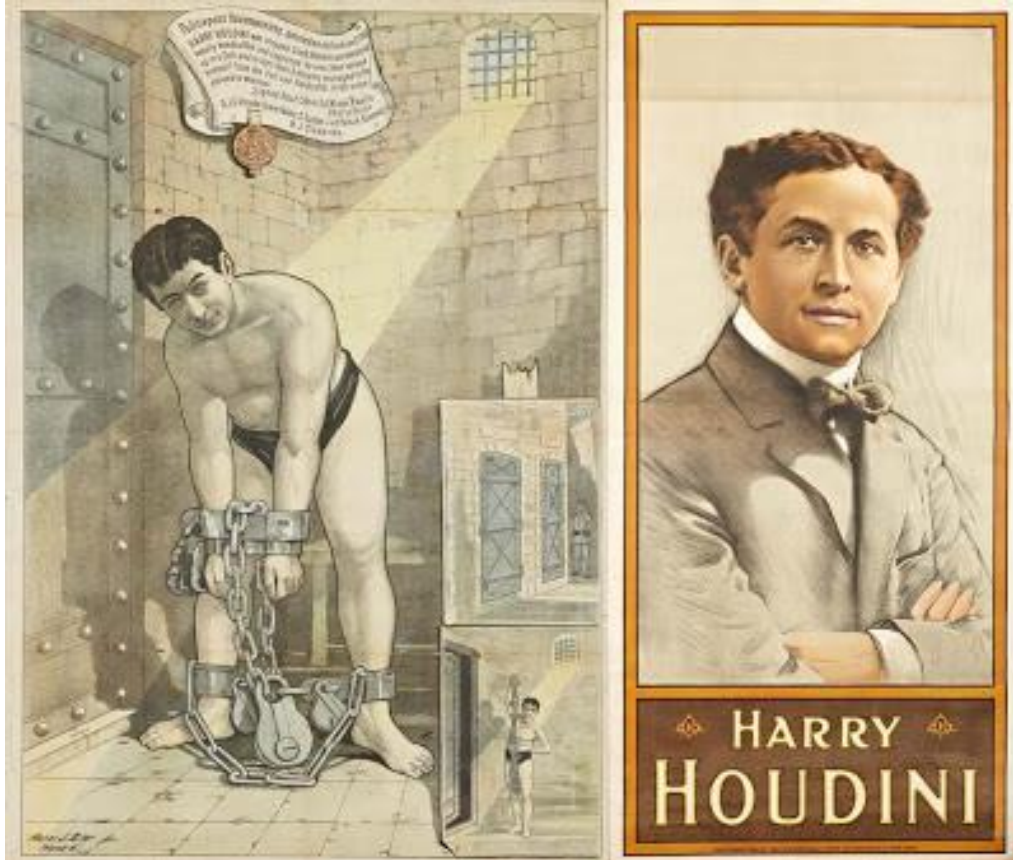


Sweet Siberia!

In Moscow, Houdini escaped from a Siberian prison transport van. Houdini publicly stated that, had he been unable to free himself, he would have had to travel all the way to Siberia, where the only key was kept.



Un-Safe Allegations

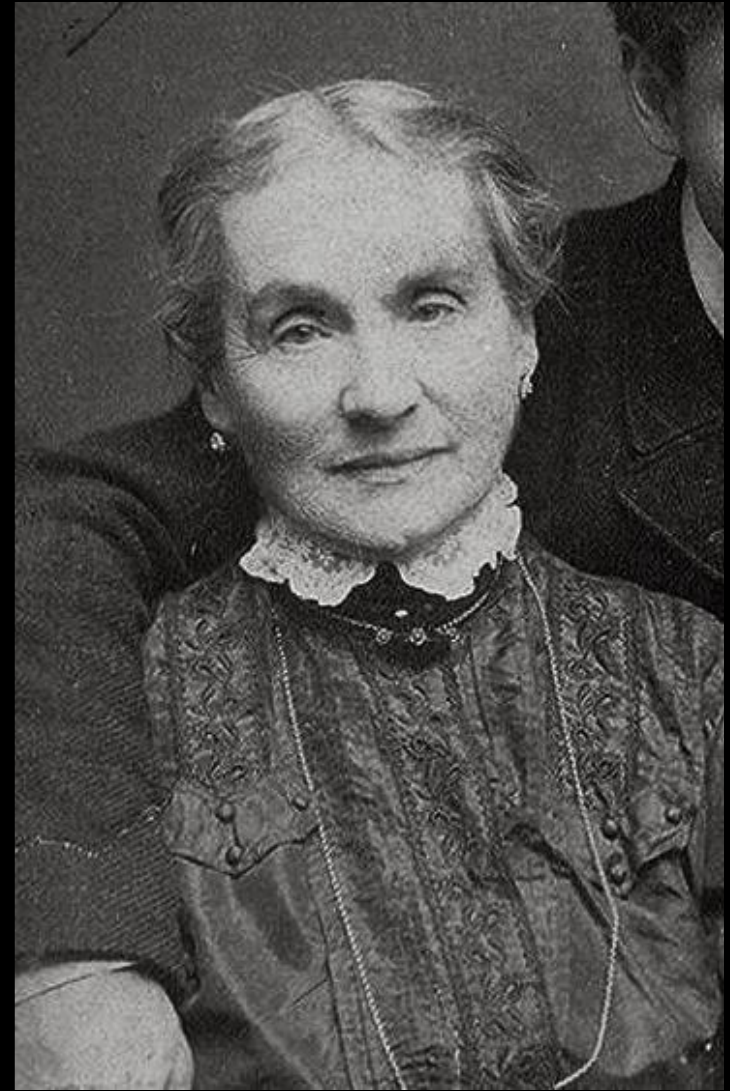


In Cologne, he sued a police officer, Werner Graff, who claimed he made his escapes via bribery.

Houdini won the case when he opened the judge's safe (he would later say the judge had forgotten to lock it).

All For Mom

With his new-found wealth and success, Houdini purchased a dress said to have been made for Queen Victoria. He then arranged a grand reception where he presented his mother in the dress to all their relatives. Houdini said it was the happiest day of his life.



Let's Go Home

After five years on the road, Houdini, now an international celebrity, was worn down. He bought an elegant brownstone (for \$25,000, a brownstone at 278 W. 113th Street in Harlem, New York City which is still standing) in a fashionable part of Harlem and moved in with Bess—and his widowed mother.



The Back Side

The back of “278,”
which is what
Harry Houdini
always called his
house.



His and Hers



Inside, Houdini had a gigantic sunken bathtub and a large mirror installed to practice his underwater effects. The bathroom tiles were engraved with an "H," while Bess's bathroom sported a "B."

A Quick Tour

The first floor was a formal reception area, and for a time also the medical office of Houdini's brother, Leopold (who was almost killed in the house by an intruder in 1907).

According to Houdini's niece, Marie Blood, who spent a great deal of time at 278, the living area was primary on the second floor, which featured a large blue carpet with a gold dragon.

The third floor held the master bedroom, where Harry and Bess had twin beds and were served via a dumbwaiter. The bedroom also had a gold-leaf curio cabinet containing heirlooms, including the famous Mirror handcuffs. Houdini's office, workroom, and formidable library (complete with full-time librarian) was located on the top floor. The basement was used as a workshop and storage, and somehow continued to yield undiscovered Houdini treasures into the 1990s.

The Library Inside "278"



Houdini in his top floor office



Tricky House

Houdini also had the entire house wired for sound -- including an early "wireless" radio in the carpets -- so he could amaze visitors with mind reading effects. Even the front door was an illusion. It looked normal, but when you turned the knob, it opened from the hinge side.

The Whole Herd

Houdini lived at 278 with Bess, a menagerie of pets, and various family members, including both their mothers, until his death in 1926 (although he refused to occupy the house for several years after his mother's death).

'My Girls'

"Houdini was really twice married," notes biographer Ken Silverman. "He was married to Bess, and then in a way also married to his mother. He always called them 'my two girls.'"





Home Base

Although being an entertainer meant constant travel, the brownstone became home base for his family, particularly his mother, Cecelia Weiss.

Mother's Boy



Houdini had always been close to his mother, but since his father's death had demonstrated a fierce devotion rivaled only by his love for Bess. When word of her death reached him in Sweden in 1913, he reportedly fainted, then wept uncontrollably when he came to. "I am what would be called a Mothers-boy," admitted the man hailed around the world as a real-life superman. He would grieve for her the rest of his life.

All for Her

This devotion, along with a fierce desire to succeed as his father never had, led Houdini to drive himself relentlessly, and helps account for his incredible career.



Breaking Promises



Harry promised his wife Bess he would slow down, but he couldn't.

When others would have retired to enjoy their success, Houdini reinvented himself time and again, finding new ways to maintain his public appeal.

Breaking Free

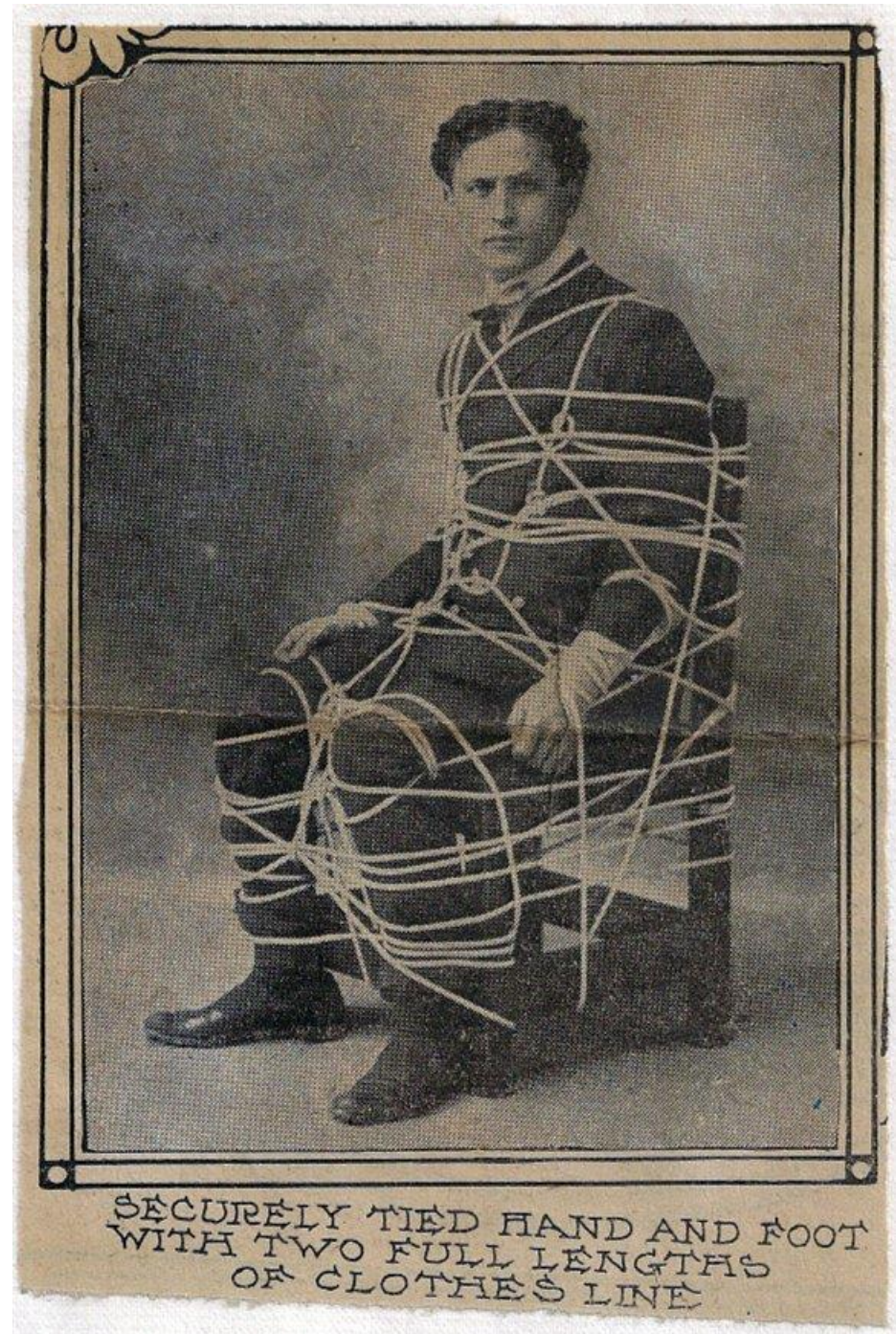
From 1907 and throughout the 1910s, Houdini performed with great success in the United States. He would free himself from jails, handcuffs, chains, ropes, and straitjackets, often while hanging from a rope in plain sight of street audiences.

But audiences are always looking for something new...something even more exciting.



A Knotty Problem

Houdini's famously powerful physique, flexibility, and general athleticism made him one of the most adept performers in history when it came to rope escapes. His mental and physical toughness came into play as well, since he seemed to believe escaping from a rope tie was merely a matter of time, and he refused to ever give up.



SECURELY TIED HAND AND FOOT
WITH TWO FULL LENGTHS
OF CLOTHES LINE

Key Strategies

In his 1921 book "Magical Rope Ties and Escapes," Houdini explained many of the strategies he used. The most important phase of the act was the actual tying up process. "There are many types of rope ties," Houdini wrote, "and in all of them the secret of escape depends on the ability of the one being secured to gain the necessary slack for a starter." The following excerpts from "Rope Ties" describe some of the techniques he would employ while being bound with a sixty-foot rope:



Starting at One End

The whole secret lies in the fact that it is quite impossible to tie a man while in a standing position, with such a length of rope, so that he cannot squirm out of it with comparative ease, if the tying **BEGINS AT ONE END OF THE ROPE** and finishes at the other . . .

It is the experience of all who have used this tie, that the first few knots are carefully tied, but after a time it will be found that the rope is being used up very slowly, and they will begin winding it around the body and making very few knots . . .

A Swell Guy

If the committee . . . begin to make more knots than suits you, it will be well to swell the muscles, expand the chest, slightly hunch the shoulders, and hold the arm a little away from the sides.

After a little practice you will find that such artifices will enable you to balk the most knowing ones. You should always wear a coat when submitting to this tie, as that will be found to be an added help in obtaining slack . . .

A Trick Up His Sleeve

But he wasn't opposed to a little trickery, either: "A sharp knife with a hook-shaped blade should be concealed somewhere on the person, as it may be found useful in case some of the first, carefully tied knots prove troublesome. A short piece cut from the end of the rope will never be missed."

How I Get Out of My Rope Ties

By Harry Houdini



1. The sailor boys, whom I had seen before, had the time of their lives tying me to that chair. And not one of them observed the sort of shoes I wore.



2. Upsetting myself, I was able to extract my foot from my Congress-Gaitor Shoe.



3. With both feet now out of my shoes, it wasn't difficult to extricate myself from the tie.



4. Until finally the loosened ropes dropped off me and I was free in 54 seconds.

Failure Means a Drowning Death

In 1908 he offered \$1,000 to anyone with a device that could hold him. His open challenge attracted the makers of packing cases, pianos, roll-top desks -- even a huge envelope. He also introduced the famous milk can escape, reminding audiences that "Failure Means a Drowning Death."



He might die!



The possibility of failure and death thrilled his audiences.

Houdini called the Milk Can "the best escape that I have ever invented." What made it great was not its difficulty -- it was perhaps the simplest of all his escapes -- but his dramatic presentation.

The Whole Routine

In performance Houdini poked and pounded the can to demonstrate its solidity. When he walked offstage a moment, stagehands filled it to overflowing with twenty or so pails of water. Returning in a bathing suit, he first invited the audience to experience what long submersion might be like. He asked them to time themselves while holding their breath. Then he squeezed himself into the can, the displaced water splashing onto the stage. Long before a minute elapsed, most spectators gave up, gasping. Houdini, however, stepped out of the can, smiling, to perform the actual test.

The Actual Test

Kukol [his assistant] appeared onstage with an ax. Houdini explained that if something went wrong, Franz would after a certain time smash the milk can open. Now handcuffed, he again folded himself inside.

This time the steel cover was slammed on, the hasps latched, the cover padlocked. The ghost house was pulled forward to surround the can. The audience waited nervously, watches in hand, Kukol standing ready to hack. After little more than two minutes Houdini walked from the cabinet, dripping, puffing, blowing, breathless. The ghost house was withdrawn, revealing the milk can with its six padlocks still closed and in place.



What was really going on?

It is understood, of course, that the milk can will bear a close examination. Its simple construction and the fact that it is made entirely of metal make it appear very secure and free from trickery. The simple method of escape depends on the fact that the collar of the tapering portion is not riveted to the top of the large cylindrical portion of the can. The rivets are there, but they are shams. Inside the milk can, the performer can separate the two portions at the joint. This is very practical, and despite its simplicity, it cannot be detected.

The Secret is Safe

The secret is safe because the collar fits tightly to the cylinder. It cannot be pulled from its position; no one can obtain a good hold on it. The sides of the collar are slippery (they may even be slightly greased), and there is no possibility of any one's budging it. But from within the can, the performer is in an ideal position to work. With ordinary effort he can break the neck away from the cylinder and thus escape. The stronger the performer, the easier the escape.

A Few Loose Screws?

By removing the loose section and sliding it out of the way, all difficulties are overcome; and after the escape it is necessary merely to replace the loose portion and make sure that it is firmly in position so that it will again stand inspection.



(APP2) APPLETON, Wis., May 26 -- HOUDINI'S MILK CAN -- This was Harry Houdini's can from his famous milk can escape, unloaded at the Outagamie Museum by Christopher Miller, right, curator, Diane Kromm of the museum staff. (With John Solomon's "Houdini Legacy" for AMs and PMS Tuesday, May 30. (AP LaserPhoto) (bep61530mbr/post-crescent/ed deschler) 1989

Harder than it Sounds

While the Milk Can may sound easy, and certainly was simpler than most of his other escapes, folding oneself into such a tiny space while under water required nerves and stamina few possessed. But above all, as advertisements for the act attest -- "FAILURE MEANS A DROWNING DEATH" -- the Milk Can demonstrates Houdini as master showman.

Hold Me Tight

Houdini also expanded his challenge escape act — in which he invited the public to devise contraptions to hold him — to include nailed packing crates (sometimes lowered into the water), riveted boilers, wet-sheets, mailbags, and even the belly of a whale that washed ashore in Boston. Brewers challenged Houdini to escape from his milk can after they filled it with beer.



Houdini's Iron Maiden apparatus.

CREDIT: *International Museum and Library of the Conjuring Arts*

Good Advertising

Many of these challenges were prearranged with local merchants in what is certainly one of the first uses of mass tie-in marketing. Rather than promote the idea that he was assisted by spirits, as did the Davenport Brothers and others, Houdini's advertisements showed him making his escapes via dematerializing, although Houdini himself never claimed to have supernatural powers.

Bone Breaking Work

Every escape carried some risk, and each performance took a physical toll. "Houdini broke, injured, sprained almost everything," says Silverman. "One of the worst times was in Pittsburgh. He had some longshoreman come up on stage and tie him tightly. They pulled so hard that they ruptured his kidney."

Outside the Limits of Endurance

Houdini took his act outdoors, performing ever more dangerous water escapes. He trained by submerging himself in an icy bathtub, holding his breath while Bess timed him -- up to three minutes.

The Ultimate Trick

Then he learned that his famous Milk Can Escape was being copied and sold to imitators for \$35.

Furious, Houdini retaliated by introducing what he described as "the climax of all my labors -- the Chinese Water Torture Cell."



Houdini's water torture chamber. **CREDIT:** *International Museum and Library of the Conjuring Arts*



A Masterpiece

Some consider it Houdini's greatest trick, and it certainly had all the elements of a Houdini performance: brilliant technical conception, great physical strength, and highly dramatic presentation.

Asleep in the Deep

He would hang by his ankles in a glass and steel tank overflowing with water, with the lid padlocked. A curtain was drawn, the band played "Asleep in the Deep" -- then, three agonizing minutes later, Houdini would emerge, breathless.

He was so insanely devoted to what he was doing and so disciplined that the ultimate insanity of his life never occurred to him.



How does he do it?

Houdini explained some of his tricks in books written for the magic brotherhood throughout his career. In *Handcuff Secrets* (1909), he revealed how many locks and handcuffs could be opened with properly applied force, others with shoestrings.

Other times, he carried concealed lockpicks or keys, being able to regurgitate small keys at will.

When tied down in ropes or straitjackets, he gained wiggle room by enlarging his shoulders and chest, moving his arms slightly away from his body, and then dislocating his shoulders.

Handcuff Escape Secrets

Although Houdini was hardly the first or only performer to do handcuff escapes, he would take the act to a new level over the next several years, and it was as the "Handcuff King" that he gained his first measure of fame. There was no one "secret" to Houdini's ability to escape from handcuffs, but a combination of technical knowledge, physical skill, and trickery.

Mirror Cuffs



Left: Mirror cuffs, from which Harry Houdini was able to extricate himself in 1904 after answering a challenge to escape a supposedly escape-proof bond.

CREDIT: *International Museum and Library of the Conjuring Arts*

Close-Up of Mirror Cuffs



A close-up of the Mirror Cuffs. Though the "trick" of Houdini's escape was never revealed, some suspect the locksmith who created the "escape-proof" cuffs was an accomplice.

CREDIT: *International Museum and Library of the Conjuring Arts*

Unlocking the Secrets

It all started with what one locksmith who knew him called his "remarkable knowledge of locks and locking devices." Houdini collected and studied locks all of his life and claimed that he had "photographic eyes" that helped him remember how each type worked and could be opened.

Hidden Keys

Most of the time Houdini used a key hidden in or smuggled into the cabinet or jail cell, either on his person or by an assistant. Depending on how he was bound, Houdini would manipulate the keys with his hands -- sometimes using specially designed extension rods -- or with his teeth. But he also knew tricks for opening many of the simpler types of cuff without keys.

Getting by on a Shoestring...

In "Handcuff Secrets," a book he published in 1910 to discourage the legion of imitators trying to ride his coattails, Houdini wrote that "you can open the majority of the old-time cuffs with a shoestring. By simply making a loop in the string, you can lasso the end of the screw in the lock and yank the bolt back, and so open the cuff in as clean a manner as if opened with the original key."

Bangin' 'em Together

And as he demonstrated in his own defense during the slander trial in Germany in 1902, some cuffs could be opened simply by banging them against a hard surface, which might include a lead plate fastened at the knee under his trousers.

Slippin' 'em off

Houdini also used tricks that didn't involve opening locks. If presented with a particularly difficult lock, he might insist it be placed higher on his forearm, then simply slip these cuffs over his wrists once the easier cuffs placed there had been removed.



Faking It

And he was not above using trick cuffs, designed to pass inspection but easily opened by means of a fake rivet.

All in How You Present It!

But as he reminded us in "Handcuff Secrets," the unique magic of his escape act lay in its presentation:

"You will notice that some of these tricks are very simple -- but remember it is not the trick that is to be considered, but the style and manner in which it is presented."

I want to see!

His straitjacket escape was originally performed behind curtains, with him popping out free at the end. However, audiences were more impressed and entertained when the curtains were eliminated so they could watch him struggle to get out. Houdini and his brother both performed straitjacket escapes dangling upside-down from the roof of a building for publicity on more than one occasion.



The Straight Secret

Much like his handcuff and rope escapes, Houdini's basic straightjacket escape required both technical know-how and brute physical strength. But the major difference was that he usually performed it in plain sight, at once increasing the drama and convincing the audience that there was no "trick" involved.



Maniacal Trick

By his own account, Houdini first thought of introducing the straightjacket into his act while touring an insane asylum in Canada. Peering into a padded cell, he saw a "maniac" struggling against the device, "rolling about and straining each and every muscle in a vain attempt to . . . free himself from his canvas restraint." Houdini began experimenting the next day, and soon the straightjacket, with all its sadistic fascination, had entered into his repertoire.



How Does He Do It?

In his 1910 book "Handcuff Escapes," Houdini described how he did it:

The first step necessary to free yourself is to place the elbow, which has the continuous hand under the opposite elbow, on some solid foundation and by sheer strength exert sufficient force at this elbow so as to force it gradually up towards the head, and by further persistent straining you can eventually force the head under the lower arm, which results in bringing both of the encased arms in front of the body. Once having freed your arms to such an extent as to get them in front of your body, you can now undo the buckles of the straps of the cuffs with your teeth, after which you open the buckles at the back with your hands, which are still encased in the canvas sleeves, and then you remove the straitjacket from your body.

What it looked like

The dry, technical nature of Houdini's description belies what the escape actually looked like. As old film clips show, **(watch his escape here:**

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/houdini/sfeature/film.html>)

Houdini looks like a madman writhing and jerking about; it looks painful and one gets tired just watching it. Doubtless this was part of the fascination.

Upside down?

Houdini often turned his straightjacket routine into a public spectacle by performing it upside down, suspended from one of the towering new skyscrapers which had begun to dominate city skylines.

While requiring more strength to undo the buckles, this actually made it easier to get his arms over his head, the key to the escape.



Just Can't Quit



Despite his continued promises to Bess to retire, Harry, now in his 40s, could not step out of the limelight. In 1925, he launched a one-man show on Broadway that featured magic tricks, escapes, and exposés of spiritualists.

For a time, it seemed that the man was invincible. "He would say, 'Hit me, hit me as hard as you can,'" recalls Al Hirschfeld. "And I would hit him, but I would hurt my hand before I would hurt him."

But Houdini would not stay invincible much longer.

The Final Blow

At McGill University in Montreal he gave a lecture, then was resting before his performance.

A student came in and challenged Houdini to withstand a blow to the stomach.

The young man struck him a painful blow. "That will do," mumbled Houdini.

Because of his broken ankle, Houdini elected to remain lying on his dressing room couch. Many believe it was not unexpected and that Houdini was prepared for the blows, but with his back against a hard surface, there was no "give" when the punches were struck, which is key to performing a feat of physical prowess such as absorbing blows to the stomach.

Hence the blows from Whitehead were especially damaging to Houdini's internal organs.



Eyewitness Sketch

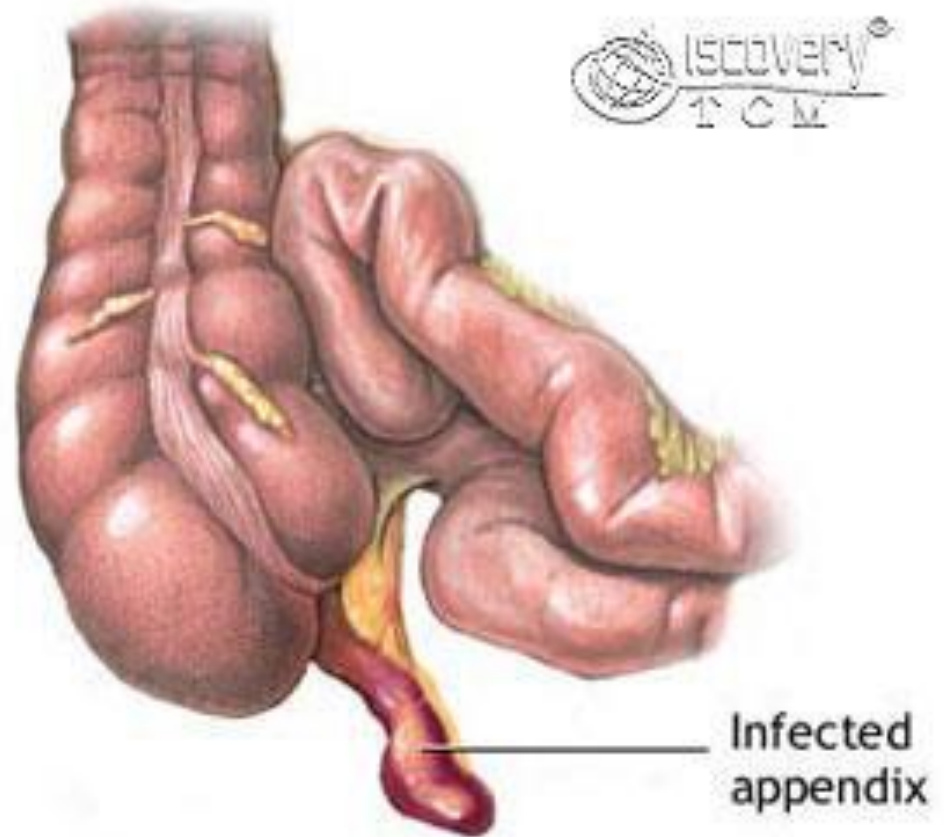


Stubborn Strength

- The stomach blows -- which he had invited as a test of his legendary strength – either aggravated a case of appendicitis, or caused traumatic appendicitis (rare, but possible), there are multiple theories and regardless, he soon became seriously ill.
- In a final display of stamina and willpower, Houdini performed the next day and again in Detroit, he struggled through his performance, then fell ill on the train to his next stop.

Burst

Doctors later found widespread infection from a burst appendix.



What does that mean?

The appendix, which is about the size and shape of a pinky finger, gets very inflamed/swollen until, in one area, its muscular wall gets so thin that it breaks open, releasing the bacteria-laden fluid inside.

But the fluid doesn't explode out like a splatting water balloon; it seeps and oozes out as if the balloon had sprung a leak

Too Late

His appendix was removed on October 25th, but the delay had allowed an infection to set in, and he died in Detroit on Halloween.

He was 52 years old. After a life spent in pursuit of fame, Harry Houdini would now assume his place in history.

Insurance Claims

DENIED
MEDICAL
CLAIM

Interestingly enough his insurance company tried to establish that Houdini was suffering from the illness (appendicitis) before the dressing room incident (which has now become a common explanation for his death amongst some people).

They said that it's more likely Houdini was suffering from appendicitis before the attack and the punch only worked to cover-up the serious infection developing in his abdomen. If so they would not have to pay double indemnity for an accidental death. Some newspapers aided in this, reporting that Houdini was ill on his arrival in Montreal and was traveling with a nurse.

Newspaper of the Time

Science Solves the "Secret" of Harry Houdini's Death

How One Punch Was Fatal to the Master Magician



That the story of the film was true, although some were apt to say, is shown by the fact that Harry Houdini, who spent his life working under scientific and logical conditions, could not escape the effects of a single punch. Houdini's strength, his remarkable physical constitution was a well-known fact to his friends. The only way the doctors could diagnose the cause of his death.

In a long examination of all the parts of the body, the doctors found that the only wound was a small one on the forehead. This wound, which was on the right side of the head, was the only one that was fatal. The doctors found that the wound was on the forehead, and that it was the only one that was fatal. All of these symptoms, with the exception of the wound, would indicate that the cause of his death was a single punch.

One of Houdini's famous stunts. The "Great Escape" was a feat of endurance and skill. Houdini was the first to escape from the "Water Torture Cell" in London, England.

The great magician died after being confined in a water-tight box for 36 hours. The cause of his death was a single punch on the forehead.



The Fat Death of Houdini. A. Houdini's head; B. Houdini's chest; C. Houdini's abdomen; D. Houdini's legs.

It is believed that the cause of his death was a single punch on the forehead.



SHOWS THE METHODS USED BY Houdini. Houdini was the first to escape from the "Water Torture Cell" in London, England.

It is believed that the cause of his death was a single punch on the forehead.

Refuted!

**MEDICAL
CLAIM**

APPROVED

But sworn affidavits from all of Houdini's crew refuted the idea that the magician was ill before Montreal. It's true that a nurse was traveling with the show, but she was looking after Bess who was still recovering from a serious bout of food poisoning. The insurance company failed to establish pre-illness and eventually paid out.

Losing a Legend

Banner headlines, long obituaries, and a crowded public funeral in New York marked Houdini's passing. These were but a few of the signs that the world knew it had lost one of the most original and beloved entertainers of all time.

It was Houdini's wish that he be buried at the right side of his mother and that her letters to him be placed in his casket.



MASTER WIZARD STILL IN DEATH—Harry Houdini, who for years held first rank among stage magicians, and earned wide and well-merited fame as a ruthless foe and exposé of charlatans and spiritualistic "mediums", died at Detroit, Michigan, while on tour a short time ago. His remains were prepared for burial by W. R. Hamilton & Company, of Detroit, and forwarded to New York City, where they were received by Samuel Rothschild. For two days they lay in state in Mr. Rothschild's establishment, the West End Funeral Chapel, while notables from the theatrical world visited the mortuary to pay their respects. Flowers in great profusion were sent by members of the profession and the dead magician's host of personal friends, three full cars being required to convey the floral tributes to the cemetery. The casket used for interment was a Boyertown solid bronze, and an hermetically sealed inner liner, made especially for Mr. Houdini, for use in his stage performances by the Boyertown Burial Casket Company last summer, was used to enclose the body inside the outer case of bronze. It is estimated that considerably more than a thousand people passed by the remains as they lay in state in Mr. Rothschild's mortuary.

Legacy

How do you summarize the life of a ferociously driven Jewish Hungarian-American who escapes poverty by hurling himself from bridges in handcuffs and straitjackets, becomes an international superstar, turns savagely on his magical mentor, feuds with siblings, adores his mother, pilots Australia's first powered flight, and much more before dying from a ruptured appendix on Halloween, nine days after a student caught the great magician unawares with a series of gut-punches?

In the final analysis of a legend perhaps it is best summarized by Houdini himself, who once said simply, "I do tricks nobody can explain."

