

Embryos

Paul Prater

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Dedication

Dedicated to Rachel Smith, who supports me, inspires me and helps to make me the best that I can be.

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I am especially grateful to each of these people who I am proud to call my friends.

Paul Prater
Little Rock, Arkansas
2015

Introduction

I wasn't happy. My life felt empty somehow. I was successful. I was advancing in a law firm, I was winning cases and I was making good money. I was married, had a home, a nice car, all of things that mark success. However, something was missing.

Beginning in junior high, I started playing in bands. I was on the football team and I was generally comfortable being in front of people.

Throughout college, I continued to play in bands and upon completion of law school, I began my career as a trial attorney. It seems that my entire life I had always had an outlet for performance. However, as I moved up in the firm, I was no longer going to trial regularly, I was managing. I was no longer playing music. I had lost touch with any outlet for performance. My world was work, go to bed, get up and work. I was successful on the outside, but empty on the inside.

I was raised in a very conservative home in the Southern United States. My father was a preacher and in the military and my mother was a stay at home mom, raising the kids. My dad had a big garden and raised food and was the authority figure. It was all very traditional and quaint, but not at all unusual for where I grew up.

I lived in Arkansas, in the Bible Belt. I went to the most liberal college in the state, and while it was indeed liberal, it was still a religious school, if in name only. In many ways I was very sheltered. There was one way to live life and it was the same path most people take. Go to school, get a job, get married, have kids and eventually retire.

A chance encounter changed me. Have you ever had a seemingly meaningless and coincidental event change your entire

world? If not, then it is a strange and wonderful feeling. It is like awakening from a foggy dream and seeing things in a different way for the first time. You missed an entire part of the world that was there, but had never been revealed to you. I experienced this in a way I never would have expected.

A friend of mine was in a play. This was a really big production. It was risqué and odd and unlike anything I had experienced. It told a story that really struck me personally. I don't know why or how, since it had nothing to do with who I was or experiences I had, but it touched me personally nonetheless.

Most of the actors in the play were from New York and we all went out for drinks afterwards. Upon speaking with them, I realized that there were other ways to live life. I felt a sort of longing to be able to do what they did. Not be an actor, but to live life on my terms. I wanted to break away from the expected way to live, a way that didn't fit who I was or am. It opened my eyes to other ways to view the world. It was my awakening, which was good and bad. It gave me hope for something different, but it also made me yearn for something different as well, deepening that feeling of discontent.

I wanted to create an emotional response in an audience, in the same way they did for me. I wanted to create the idea that there is more to life than just get up, go to work and earn enough money to cover your bills, go back home to bed and start over the next day. I am quite certain none of them had the slightest inkling of what I felt, but I wanted to somehow share with others what I had experienced.

Later that same week, by sheer chance, I pulled an old magic book off the bookshelf and started reading it. It was out of boredom I suppose. Maybe it is because I was searching for real magic in my life. I came across a small section on mentalism and it was enough to fire my imagination. From there, I read voraciously. I stumbled on that outlet for performance; my chance to try to share something with an audience.

In short time, I was writing my first show. One thing I don't have a shortage of is tenacity and focus. I WOULD perform stage shows. The problem is that I had no real experience and didn't really know how to write a show. I didn't have anyone to work with me either. I joined the local magic club, but didn't find anyone who had the same ideas for a show as I did. I didn't find serious performers to speak with or learn from.

In my mind, I knew that I still wanted to try to bring a transformative experience to my audience. I wanted to invoke emotion on multiple levels. I wanted discomfort, I wanted humor, I wanted wonder. I realized that the only one who could make my show happen was me.

I will say that I wasn't so foolhardy that I just jumped into the first show with no rehearsal or working of the routines on an audience. I practiced the working of the routines on the least desirable place to workshop a stage show; an outdoor flea market.

Though it may not have been ideal, I learned quickly what worked and what didn't. When people aren't paying you and they are free to walk off, you must learn to be entertaining. Technical proficiency with card slights? It doesn't matter. Super slick new technology? It doesn't matter. Entertainment is all that matters. This was a lesson that I am very happy to have learned early.

From there, like many performers, I had a show here and there, largely free, where I was allowed to fail. Failure brings teaching moments and only through my failures could I have gotten better. However, the Holy Grail for me was still the solo stage show. I decided at a certain point, that I just had to do it. I found a theater in my neighborhood, got the OK for use of the space and launched a solo show. It wasn't my best, of course, but one has to start somewhere. The next show got better and the one after that was better still. I am sure that ten years from now, they will still be better.

I invested in acting lessons, worked with a director and gathered as much experience in performing as I could, including

traditional theater. I also landed a role in a small indie film and auditioned for several other films. Anything that allows me to “perform” I see as beneficial.

I perform mentalism for a reason. It allows me to strive for that goal of bringing a transformative experience to my audience. Mentalism can allow your audience to believe that the impossible is possible, whether they believe in you or not. Even if a spectator thinks it is just tricks, they still have to admit that something was done that they cannot explain. That means that the reality is there is a different way of looking at a problem. There is a parallel and different reality. One they weren't previously aware of.

This is exactly what I was shown by that play. There is a different and parallel reality. There is a different way to live. There is not just one way. This is what excites me so much about mentalism and I hope that by sharing that with my audience, I can also open their eyes to alternatives and maybe, just maybe, touch a life along the way.

**PART ONE:
WHERE TO START AND HOW TO FINISH**

All routines start as embryonic nuggets that develop into something beautiful or they become weird, ugly things that have to be put down.

Don't be afraid to put them down if need be.

Creating a Show

I think that it is important for you, the reader, to have some background in where I am coming from in discussing shows. I don't do kids shows. I do a small amount of corporate entertainment. I do stage shows. I do festivals. I do street shows. I do parlor shows. However, my favorite is the stage show on a real stage in a theater, so when I am discussing a show, this is the show I am referring to. I consider my shows to be theater. I have overarching themes, I have continuity. I have scripts and light cues. I have blocking and timing. I have all of the standards of theater.

A show is composed of three primary elements: a theme, style and framework. Without incorporating these three elements, your show will fall flat. Too often, in the beginning, a show is no more than a string of pet effects performed, perhaps with a thought towards overall theme and progression, but just as often, not.

1. Create a theme.

The theme is a simple one or two word definition of the point of your show. It is your story.

Examples include:

- Time travel-What if you could go back and change time? What if you could predict the future? These are relevant themes for mentalism.
- Fairy Tales-Fairy tales are a rich source for material. I wrote an entire show, which I have yet to perform, which is wholly based on fairy tales.
- Mythology-Closely related to fairy tales are mythological tales. These could be very rich sources for material.
- Your Story-People are often curious about you and what you do. Think about the questions you are often

asked. “How did you get started in this?” is a good example. Answer those questions in the show.

Why themes are important.

Why have themes? Themes are critically important to the coherence and flow of a show. If we want magic and mentalism to be perceived as legitimate theater, then we must make it such. If we treat it like a vaudevillian slapstick farce, then it will continue to be treated as such.

All stories have themes. Take Romeo and Juliet for example. The theme is simple. It is “star crossed lovers.” The theme doesn’t have to be deep or complex. Perhaps it is as simple as “I am a mindreader.” However, the theme will also give you the direction for choosing the right routines. It will help you in suggesting scripting. Also, a theme provides the context through which your audience views your show.

Establish your theme early on.

The theme of the show needs to be established near the beginning. Have you ever started to watch a movie, but then got bored because you couldn’t really figure out what was going on? People need to know what to expect and what they are going to see. You should come back to theme throughout the show. The routines and script should reinforce and drive the theme forward.

I will give an example. In my show, *The Odditorium*, the theme is “fate or freewill.” I do a short opening piece, which is the Human Blockhead, and then a short intro. In the introduction, I set up the theme. Below is my scripting.

I have thought a lot about fate and freewill in my life and how it has affected me. The question of fate versus freewill is really the cornerstone of philosophic thought. I want to provide a concrete example of what I am talking about.

When I finished my undergraduate degree I went looking at jobs. I got a degree in English and unfortunately, there were no English factories with a shortage of workers, so I had to figure out something to do. So, looking for a good career choice, I started working on an obvious path for success... my Masters in studio art. I made it through one semester and realized that I wasn't going to get very far in art either. So I went home over Christmas break with a lot on my mind and decide that I would... rather watch movies to try to forget about needing to plan for my future. But, as it turns out, one of those movies did provide a path to my future. I watched the Devil's Rejects. No, no, wait, I didn't become a psycho murderer, wrong movie. One of the movies I watched was The Devil's Advocate.

That movie starred Keanu Reeves as a southern lawyer. He had a horrible accent. He sounded like a bad Elvis impersonator. He moves to New York, where it turns out that he is working for the Devil. I don't mean the Devil, like how you call your boss the Devil, I mean literally, the Devil.

So I'm watching this movie thinking, wow, I think I want to be an attorney. I can get paid big bucks, live in a sweet apartment in New York, and do deals with the Devil.

So, I call my girlfriend at the time and tell her, hey, I'm going to law school. See she was also wondering what I was going to do with a Master's degree in studio art, so she thought law school was an excellent idea. This girl had plans for her future. I did say her future, not necessarily mine. Anyway, she calls me less than 24 hours later and says you are signed up for the law school admissions test in February, so start studying.

Now, looking back on this entire chain of events, I wondered whether fate or freewill took part in leading me to where I am today. Consider the fact that I could have

chosen not to take the LSAT, but she had used my credit card, so I had already paid for it, so I wasn't backing out. I could have chosen not to go to law school, but I really didn't want to work and the art program didn't look like a promising path for gainful employment. I could have dropped out of law school, but after finishing the first semester, the hardest part is over, so I might as well stay in. So, I am an attorney because I chose to be, right?

But then I started thinking. Would I be an attorney if I didn't date that girl? If I wasn't dating her would I have signed up for the LSAT? Then I remembered as a kid, my mom always said I would argue with the wall and that I should be either a preacher or a lawyer. So, was it really freewill or was I destined to be a lawyer?

I establish the overall theme at the beginning of the show that drives each of the routines to follow. In *Bibliomancer*, it is even more basic. I simply have a voiceover that describes what bibliomancy is and introduces me. This short voiceover introduces my theme.

Don't Abandon Your Theme

The theme isn't something just for you to introduce at the beginning as a vague concept and never return to again. Each routine needs to reinforce and refer back to your theme, while at the same time, moving the entire show forward in some manner. Don't leave your theme an orphan after the beginning.

2. Determine the style.

Style is the manner in which your story is told. It is the adjectives that a viewer would use to describe the show.

Some examples include:

- Humorous
- Dark
- Smart

Why style is important

Style is important to your show because it will direct the manner in which you write. How do you want the audience to interpret your show? Do you want them to say that the show was really funny, smart, dark, clever, or what have you? Make a list of three adjectives you want to describe the show and work from there. With a theme and adjectives to describe your show, you will have your basic framework within which to create.

I will admit that early on, humor isn't something that I thought I could incorporate into a show. I didn't think it fit me well. However, I have learned that it does. After writing and performing enough, I have started to learn what people laugh at in a show. I incorporate a lot of humor. I wouldn't call my shows comedy, because the humor is rarely composed of jokes. It isn't goofiness. I have just learned that the delivery of certain lines is inherently funny by the juxtaposition of inappropriateness. You can see this in particular in my "Ugly Baby" routine from *The Odditorium* and "Emotional Connection" in *Bibliomancer*.

Once you know how you want your audience to perceive your show, you will have a direction from which to work in your scripting. Every routine doesn't, and frankly, shouldn't have only one facet to it. For instance, I like doing darker pieces and then flipping back to something a little lighter. I like the texture in a show. If it is all one thing, it gets old. Keep them on their toes.

How your character affects your style.

Character is something that I typically don't address too often, primarily because I don't have one. At least, that is what I thought for a long time. However, I do have a character and it is me, however, it is me with a bigger personality.

The style in which I write is true to who I am and therefore consistent with my character. However, if I am trying to portray a dark and serious man, then my style of writing and presentation should likewise, reflect that seriousness.

Part of the reason my character is me is pretty simple. I don't want to have to try to stay in character as someone else. I like myself and want to show who I am to my audience. I have a Southern accent, I am fun loving and I am a large, tall man. I need to play to my strengths.

There are a multitude of sources out there regarding character. My advice is this. If you are not a good actor, then don't try to stray too far from who you are. If you want to aspire to character acting, then please invest in a good acting coach if you don't have the background for it.

If you are realistic in your abilities and who you want the audience to see, it will guide you towards the style that is appropriate for you.

3. Create the framework of your show.

The framework of the show is the flesh that is hung upon the bones of the theme. This will include what effects you will perform and how long the show will last.

Initial creation of the framework

I write the framework of the show in an outline format, filling it in as I go. Often, I just start with general ideas. These are conceptual points that I want to get across to my audience. Occasionally, I may have some effects or routines in mind, but generally, I am thinking of the overarching story and how I want it to progress. From there, I need to decide what effects I will perform.

Determine how long it should be.

This is an important one. What are your performing specifications? Is it just your show? Do you have a specific amount of time? Even assuming it is all your decision, you need to decide a time and try to stick to it. P. Dan Wiwchar said "Your

brain can only absorb what your ass can endure.” This is so true. If the show is too long you can lose your audience.

Also, different cultures will endure different amounts of time. I have learned that an hour and twenty minutes is usually a sufficient amount of time. The first half tends to be about 45 minutes, then an intermission and then the conclusion. That is assuming there is an intermission. I have found that even an hour is sufficient.

Early on, I was concerned about giving a long enough show so that people felt that they got their money’s worth. Now, I am more concerned about giving a terrific show. If they leave amazed, or at least entertained, they won’t feel that they didn’t get their money’s worth.

Let me also interject here that I think having your routines tightly timed is important. If you need to do an hour show, you need to do an hour show. That is one thing I pride myself on. I don’t need to refer to a clock or watch or phone because I know exactly how long each routine lasts. Yes, there is some byplay, but it is usually at the same locations in a routine, so I know my length. If I am given just one hour, I know that I can hit it, usually within one to two minutes.

Consider Your Ending

Think about a favorite movie or book. Chances are, the ending left you with a feeling, an emotion of some kind. This is what I strive for in my endings. This is what I want people to remember the most.

The ending needs to neatly tie up the rest of the show and be consistent with the theme. As an example, in *The Odditorium*, I used a confabulation ending that answered that question of why I do this as well as answering the question of whether I believe in fate or freewill. It answers the question posed in the introduction.

In *Bibliomancer* I also end with a confabulation routine, though completely different, and described in this book, while talking about books, reading and time travel, also referencing a book used earlier in the show. This neatly ties up the ending, reinforces the theme and is a strong piece of mentalism as well.

Writing & Memorizing Scripts: Necessity or Needless?

I believe that the script is important for two reasons. First, it gives you grounding. It gives you a place to come back to in your presentation. It makes you sure of your words and helps eliminate the “ums” and “ahs,” the vocal tics that interrupt good speech. If something flusters you, the script is your safe harbor. This helps substantially when something inevitably goes wrong.

Secondly, the script allows you to consider and craft your words, and therefore your show, carefully. It makes you think about what you are saying, rather than just giving instructions. Wouldn't you rather say things in an artful and concise way, rather than just giving rote instructions?

I have spoken with a lot of performers and the opinions are all over the map. I have heard complaints that it makes you sound too wooden and like you are reciting a script. If that were the case, then I would recommend acting lessons. Think of the most moving scene in a movie you have seen. You know what; the words that were so moving, the emotion? That was a script. That was acting. I don't buy the excuse that a script makes you sound wooden. However, if you are concerned about that, then you can go off script.

On the other hand, there are the staunch scriptwriters who would never deviate from it and use them religiously. I am not that serious about slavishly following the script word for word in every routine. I need to deviate at times, as anyone doing mentalism will.

I script all of my shows. I want specific words in specific places. However, when I speak with audience members, I just speak with them. I don't script my interactions, because they are just interactions with human beings. No need to script something that we do every day.

Additionally, I have no problem improvising. I frequently do so. Some of the best lines, which I later wrote into shows, came about from improvisation while performing, either from my audience or me.

There is another advantage of a script. If you are working with a theater, you will need something to direct them in regard to light and sound cues. I assure you that they want a script with those cues written in. It is what they are used to working with and you will look professional if you have this. I always make tech copies of each script as well. I put them in three ring binders so they are easy to use and I have a copy for each tech person.

Tips for Finding Space

After you write a show, you need to find a space in which to perform it. I would assume your goals would be little to no cost and a reasonable market. All I can say is good luck! I will provide some of my suggestions and what has worked for you and hopefully me will find it useful in your own hunt.

Theaters

If you want to do theater style stage shows, then obviously, that helps direct your search. I would recommend looking for small, local theaters, Search for community theaters. Then, go see their plays. You can email or call, but meeting people face to face is the way to get things done. Once you have made that connection, ask about the ability to use the space. I have generally found that the preference is for them to rent you the space. If you are confident in your ability to effectively market and bring in a crowd, then you can make good money with this route.

Another option with the small theaters is doing a door split. When I am performing out of town, I posit it as a fundraiser for the theater. Generally their techs work for free as volunteers. They have very little cost and they get half of ticket sales. This generates revenue for the theater. This also encourages them to promote the event. The more butts they get in seats, the more they make, and likewise, the more I make. I make it easy because I provide press releases, posters, radio spots or whatever they want. I learned early on to do this, because you don't want someone else controlling your marketing.

If you are successful with this route, be sure to get letters of recommendations from the theater managers you worked with. These can be helpful when trying to book future shows. When a manager knows you have done this before and are reliable, it will make future bookings easier. Also, ask the theater manager what

other theaters might enjoy your show. A recommendation from someone in the industry is priceless.

Public Spaces

If you are self-producing the show, look in your town for public spaces that are available for free or little cost. For instance, many art centers or museums and libraries will have theater space. These often can be had for little cost or for free. They may or may not work for you. You can also approach them about handling the show like a fundraiser if you are unsure about renting the space.

If your show is something that can go over well at a fair or public event, consider this as well. Virtually every town had some kind of festival or event. They are usually listed on state or county website calendars with the person you need to contact. While my mentalism shows are generally not suited for this I do have a mentalism and sideshow routine that is well suited for festival performances and this has allowed a lot of exposure.

Convention and Visitor's Bureaus

If you are a performer, either part or full time, you should get to know someone with the local Visitors and Conventions Bureau. They know everything going on in town and can be a great source of marketing. They also can help you make connections. They can be your introduction into the hospitality industry, which can be quite helpful.

Small towns are always looking for entertainment and if you can make someone look good, such as someone at the Convention and Visitors Bureau, because they brought in a great act, then you will find it easier to get your booking. You can ask them if they are aware of a venue and who to contact.

Hopefully some of this will prove helpful on your path to booking theaters for your show.

How to Market the Solo Show

The type and location of your show will dictate a lot of the manner in which you market. The real key to any type of marketing is defining your market and then getting an effective message to your target audience. If you can meet this goal, then you should achieve a relative amount of success.

I am no marketing guru and I won't claim to be one. With that said, I have attended a lot of courses on marketing and marketing is a regular function of my day job. As for performing, I can only relate my personal experiences and what has worked or not worked for me. If you want to read more about marketing yourself as a mentalist, you can read the words of one wiser than I in that respect. Look for *The Market Minded Mentalist* by David Thiel.

Before getting into specifics, there are some general marketing ideas that you need to be aware of, assuming you are not already.

- **Use Graphics.** This is a visual and graphic driven world. You need a good graphic for advertising your show. If you cannot create one, go to someone who can. There are online options for cheap sources of graphic designers, such as [fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com).
- **Limit wordiness.** People are going to be captured by your image, not your words. People rarely walk by and read words. Keep them to a minimum in your advertising.
- **Include all details.** You want to include all of the details of the performance, such as time, date and location on the advertising.

- **Control your marketing.** Don't ever let anyone else take the lead on the marketing. You know your show better than anyone else. You know what image you want to project. Always control the marketing.
- **Gather data.** Get as much information as you can at every show. I have the person working the door ask each audience member how they heard about the show. That helps me know how to market in the future.

Define your Target Audience

Who do you want to come to your show? The short answer is “everyone,” but unless you have a limitless budget, you can't effectively market to everyone. Without defining your audience, you don't have a direction in which to market. Consider the following questions to help define your audience.

- What age range are you seeking to hit? Do you want children there?
- What demographic will this appeal to? Is it dark? Is it funny? Think about how to reach those people.
- Is your show smart and intellectual? Alternatively, is it easy for anyone to grasp.

I will give you a solid example of my target audience. I don't want children at my show. It is mindreading. Children already think adults can read their minds. They would be bored and ruin the show for the parents.

My show, while using humorous elements, also has dark elements. I want to appeal to that crowd and they generally respond well to my show. I have been hired multiple times by ghost hunting groups and psychic conventions as a performer. That is another part of my target audience.

I want to also draw in those that are smart, prone to deeper thinking and those that, at least in their own mind, are intellectuals. My girlfriend was approached after one of my shows and told by an attendee that she liked the show because it was intellectual, like him.

Finally, I want to draw in the artistic, theater-going crowd. In the South at least, this is usually a more permissive crowd. I have some slightly blue material and some language. While this would fly by in many regions, it doesn't always where I live, in the land of God and guns.

Reach Your Target Audience

Your Email List

Once you have defined that audience you need an effective way to reach them. The best way should be through your own email list. With every show, you need to be collecting name and email addresses. I won't get into the vagaries and nuances of SPAM laws, but make sure you are familiar with, and complying with any SPAM laws when assembling email lists.

Your own email list should be your most powerful advertising piece. This should be compiled through your website and at each and every show. I give away a T-shirt at each show to one of those who signed up for the email list. It is amazing what people will do for a t-shirt. If you perform in a wide number of venues, as I do, then you will start to collect contact information from a wide array of people, not just those who are specifically drawn to your show.

This email list is a piece of direct marketing to people who you know are already interested in what you are selling. That is your key group. These same people will often send your information on to others, such as friends and family.

Leveraging Your Contacts

Next, you need to expand your reach outside of those audience members you already know. Your contacts are people that you already know, who may or may not be audience members. These aren't strangers. These people will be more receptive to your message, but you still need to offer something to them if you expect them to help you. They can reach prospective audience members that you cannot.

Think of those who can benefit by helping you. People will be more willing to market you when you are doing something for them. This will be personal to you based on your contacts and who you know. I will provide some examples that have worked for me.

- When I perform in any theater, I always ask them to send the marketing piece to all of the people on their email list. They have a vested interest in getting people into the theater. Therefore it is in their best interest to market. I provide all marketing pieces. All they have to do is hit send.
- I am friends with a guy that is a local concert promoter and has his hands in some other events that need promotion. He often has me perform at his events. I play his band's music at the end of my show. I talk up his shows and I ask him to talk up mine. We have a different set of friends so our shared marketing is helpful.
- A lot of people from my high school graduating class still live in the area. They like to have something to do as a get together and they like to see what someone from their class is up to. I let our old class president know and I usually have a good group of folks from my high school there. The same goes for college. It is like a small class reunion. They have something to do and I get more butts in seats.

- I often deal with hotels. We have a hotel that is far from central Arkansas. It is popular, but far out of the way. They want more business from the central Arkansas area. We worked a deal where they give me two free night's stay at their hotel to give away. I put their logo on my marketing and send the piece out over Facebook. To be entered in the drawing for the hotel nights, you have to share the graphic and be at the show. We both win and everyone is happy, including two lucky audience members.
- Each time I have a self-produced show, I go to the largest radio station in the state and I give them some free tickets. My only requirement is that they give them away during the morning drive time. The radio station gets something free to give away and I get free advertising.
- As I mentioned, I often work with hotels and book conventions. I will ask the people at the hotel if they can push my show. Since it is not a regularly playing show, they are usually happy to do it. It gives their guests something to do when they are in from out of town.

Other Marketing Ideas

These ideas fall on the list because they are ideas that I have tried. Some have had limited success and some have had very little. Your success with them may vary.

- **Facebook.** Opinions differ. Mine is that this is highly effective. I don't make an event and invite everyone. I also don't mean the paid ads, but marketing directly. Create a graphic advertisement. Offer something as a giveaway for people who re-post it. Your advertising will reach many more people than it ever would through paid advertising.

- **Radio Interviews.** For me, these have been good for getting sound clips, however, they have not generated much in the way of sales. They have helped my overall visibility in the community, however. I have done just as well by just giving them tickets to give away as I have with interviews.
- **Public Calendars.** These have been effective for me. I will go to every entertainment magazine website and submit an event. If there is a Convention and Visitors Bureau, I post the event with them. I also look for any newspaper or other publication where I can list. This always generates a few ticket purchases.
- **Posters.** This hasn't been successful for me. I post them in the busy bar district and nightlife areas. It may be good for name recognition, but hasn't resulted in a ticket sale yet.
- **Newspapers.** This one has admittedly been tricky for me. I don't have an ongoing show in one location, so newspaper interviews tend to be in the smaller markets. Since there is no ongoing show, there is limited value to having a press night. Furthermore, I have not had anyone say they bought a ticket because they saw the paper. With that being said, I am not discounting the power of a good review.

What Not to Do: Otherwise Known as Mistakes I Made

I can't give a complete and comprehensive list of all of the things that can go wrong. Likewise, I can't tell you everything that you shouldn't do. However, I can provide you with some tips and ideas that I have learned the hard way.

1. **Don't have drab marketing.** Have a catchy title and tag line to explain your show. My first show was *Epiphenomenon*. I thought that title was really good since the definition of an epiphenomenon is "a secondary phenomenon that occurs alongside or in parallel to a primary phenomenon." This is a perfect definition of mentalism. However, my penchant for long words doesn't apply equally to everyone. People didn't know how to pronounce it and didn't know what it meant.

Also, I didn't have anything on the marketing to explain what the show was about. So, I had a title that was unpronounceable with a graphic that didn't describe the show. You need to be able to draw in viewers with your marketing. You want them to be curious. However, you also want them to know what you are trying to sell them.

2. **Don't waste time and money on ineffective marketing.** This may take a few shows to find out what works for you, but time spent in ineffective marketing can kill you.

3. **Don't make your show too long.** You have heard the old line "leave them wanting more." Yes, follow that. There is a certain length that is just too much. This seems to be cultural. For me an hour and half is about the longest I want to go. My first show was two hours. That was too long.

4. **Check out the theater ahead of time.** I am sure you have viewed the theater ahead of time. However, there are so many details. I will cover some of the logistics.

- Are other companies using the theater? I have had to move others props, load out immediately after a show and even cover walls that were painted pink for another show.
- Do the lights and/or sound belong to the theater? Multiple artists share a theater I frequently use. After a tiff between the theater and one of the groups, I arrive to set up my lights to find that there weren't any. They belonged to one of the groups who pulled them because of their dispute with the theater.
- How many are allowed in the space? I have performed at theaters where there are more seats than fire code would allow. Ticket sales are limited by the fire code.
- How many bathrooms are there? If there is only one, then plan on longer intermission.
- Is the heating and air in working order and sufficient? The first show I did was at a theater I had visited. All was fine, except that the night of the show we were having a heat wave and the air conditioner just wasn't working well enough. I wouldn't even shake anyone's hand I was sweating so much.
- What is the lighting like on stage? Is it sufficient to allow you to see what you need to see?
- Is the sound sufficient? I have learned that if I can take my own PA, I do so. This can be particularly important if you are doing a show in a hotel. Your client will love you as you will save them literally hundreds of dollars in AV expenses at a hotel.



PART TWO: The Odditorium

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The Odditorium

The Odditorium was my second incarnation of a show. I thought about what I really wanted a show to be. I wanted something that had the feel of an old circus. I wanted sideshow and I wanted mentalism. I also knew that I wanted to eliminate anything that looked like magic.

At the time I was really getting into sideshow performances. I wanted a vehicle to perform and sideshow and mentalism seemed to be a good fit. The sideshow, being real, reinforced that perhaps the mentalism is real. I still feel that this is a good fit and adds variety to the show.

I started thinking about not only the routines and scripting, but also the stage set. What would it look like? What could transport people back to a different time? That led me to the ideas for the set. I also had one other requirement. It needed to fit in the trunk of a Honda Accord.

Next was my theme. I decided on “fate versus freewill.” It is something that has appealed to me personally and something I have always wondered about. As I state in my introduction to the show, it isn’t something that only I wondered about. It is question that has existed throughout time. In the scripting, you will see how I continue to come back to this idea.

What follows is my set list, scripting, evolution and ideas and what I used for a stage set. I have also included some posters and marketing pieces that I created for the show.

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The sideshow. A relic of vaudeville that is rarely seen today. Well, don't miss out on a rare opportunity. Come and witness The Odditorium!

What will you see in the show? Paul Prater incorporates amazing feats of mindreading, telling you things from your childhood and demonstrating seemingly impossible examples of synchronicity. He will demonstrate how freewill can be manipulated. He explains how this has affected his life and yours as well.

Additionally he will demonstrate some classic feats of the sideshow, such as the human blockhead, the bed of nails and lifting an anvil. He won't say how that anvil is lifted, you will just have to see!

Paul has performed all over the United States and has been featured in print and radio for his unique performances. Don't miss out on this special opportunity.

Go to www.paulprater.com for
more information and tickets.



Designing the Set

I knew that I wanted to work with the idea of a circus theme. The first thing that came to mind for me was canvas circus banners. I had painted a few in the past and this is a hugely time consuming task. Luckily, I have a background in art, so I was able to design the banners myself. Using both traditional drawing and computers I was able to design banners, which I could then have printed on vinyl. I found the printer on EBay and had banners printed for an extremely low price. These can be rolled up and don't take much space. You can see them on the following page.

I also needed something upon which to rest props. I already had a table I was using, but I wanted another side table. I wanted wooden packing crates as I felt that would fit the feel. However, that didn't meet the criteria of fitting into the trunk of an Accord. The solution was painted cardboard boxes. I used heavy-duty boxes which I painted to look like wood. They looked good from the audience and they could pack flat, yet still be strong enough to hold some props.

Next, I wanted to use popcorn bags in some manner. An idea from childhood and Halloween hit me. I could put candles in the popcorn bags and line the front of the stage with them. I wanted to invoke the idea of old footlights. I used led candles in them for safety and to comply with fire code.

I added a rug and another side table and my stage set was complete. There is a picture of the stage on the following page. Also, many of the photos in the book show the stage. The linked videos also show the stage.



Odditorium Set List

Human Blockhead

Tennyson Book Test

Anvil Lift with Teeth

My Card Trick

Bed of Nails

Intermission

Ugly Kid

The End of Summer

A Sweeter Woman

One Ahead

Game of Death

My Story

The Human Blockhead

If you know what this is, and I am assuming you probably do, then you have also probably seen it a hundred times. For those who haven't though, it generally produces a strong reaction. I wanted to open my show this way. This may seem strange for a mentalism show, but let me explain why I want to open with this.

I perform primarily in theaters. When people come to a theater, they expect certain things. They expect a fourth wall. For those not familiar with theater lingo, that means that the audience expects to watch the show from their seats as though the action is on a screen. They don't expect interaction.

They also expect something somewhat highbrow, though honestly I don't know why. In the South, in particular, theater is thought of as high entertainment; something that "fancy city folk" do. People often come in in slacks and a tie and jacket.



I want to shatter those expectations immediately. I want to put people a bit on edge right from the start. I don't want them to know what to think, so I decided to do human blockhead. Also, it is short and attention grabbing.

I started out by talking and interacting with the audience. The early version of my script had me asking them questions. This was for the purpose of breaking down the fourth wall. Then, driving the nail into my nose was obviously to dispel the idea that this was a stuffy, formal affair.

The script, which I still use in street shows and festivals, is as follows.

How many here have heard of the human blockhead? How many here have seen the human blockhead? If not, then you can say from this night forward...I have seen something pretty cool The Human Blockhead.

If someone has seen it or heard of it, I do acknowledge them. I want them to know that I do see and hear and that I will interact as well.

This is a nail. It is real, you can see it and hear it. It is solid. This is a hammer. Though a small one it is also real. It is not a child's toy, but rather a coppersmith's hammer for doing small detail work. Finally this is my head. It is also real. What an odd thing to say, you may think. Ahh, but not if I am about to do something to make you doubt it.

The real nail, goes into my real head, using the real hammer. I want to make this bloodless, so I will use an existing orifice.

At this point, I "hammer" the nail into my mouth, slowing down while looking around at my audience awaiting the boos or laughter before I speak.

So you aren't too impressed, huh? How about I use a different one?

I say this with the nail between my teeth, mumbling as I try to speak. At this point, I usually also tell the crowd that if they want me to try it somewhere else, they will really have to make some noise. If the occasion and audience is right, I will also sometimes undo my zipper and start to reach. I then tell them they can't make enough noise to see that one, though someone may be able to pay me enough money.

TALES FROM THE ROAD

You never know where you are going to be asked to perform. I try to cast a wide net and one of those locations I spoke with often hosts touring bands. I hadn't heard from the booking agent in a very long time and then I got an email out of the blue asking if I could perform at Jenna Jameson's birthday party. That was one of the performances where sexual jokes were not only acceptable, but expected.

If you aren't familiar with Jenna Jameson, she is one of the world's biggest porn stars.

The line about the nail in the penis garnered a lot of interest from the rowdy, drunk, gay men up front who kept yelling for me to take my pants off the entire time I was on stage.

At this point, I proceed with the standard human blockhead routine. I am not going to explain the working. I don't want to be responsible for you poking around in your skull.

Now the hard part is not hitting your brain. Oh, and not sneezing. If I were to sneeze, we could have a fatality on the front row from a flying projectile.

I later modified how I did the human blockhead, taking advantage of the idea of formality and niceties. I picked lovely chamber music and walk out on stage with the music playing. My

body language is stiff and formal. I am trying to exude refinement.

I have a nail and hammer in my hand. I walk around, looking for a place to hammer the nail, walking to walls, then shaking my head as if this won't work.

Then, I get an "ah-hah" moment, and nail the nail into my nose. This of course, provides a sharp contrast to the formal music.

I then walk over to my table and pick up a curly moustache that I printed and mounted on cardboard with a string. I then hang the moustache on the nail, letting the visual gag sink in and then take my bow.



Jenna Jameson and myself.

Why in the World Would a Magician Do Human Blockhead?

A big problem for me is keeping my performance energy levels high, when you have a largely quiet audience. I like noise and loud applause, yelling and cheering. I welcome it. The problem with theater performances is that, again in the South, they tend to be rather stuffy affairs. It would be impolite to yell, interact or clap during theater. People have to know it is okay to do this from the beginning.

So, I control and encourage this through scripting. I have lines that I use in shows and that I chose not to use in others. I did this for the purpose of testing the effectiveness and I believe it to be highly effecting.

Right after doing the human blockhead I use the following lines, which will likely be in every show I do from here on:

The quality of a performance is largely dictated by the audience response. So, I can do a show like this.

(At this point, I stuff my hands in my pockets; hang my head and kick at the ground while mumbling the following lines.)

Hey, I have something really cool I can show you. I guess. If you want.

(Now I raise my head and smile, talking clearly and loudly.)

Or you can make some noise and we can have a lot of fun tonight!

You get a good response, loud cheering, and you are letting the audience not only know that is okay for them to interact and make noise, but it is expected! I have found this to be highly effective and have noticed a marked difference in audiences in

which I said these few lines, and those that I didn't. I think audience conditioning of expectations is very important.

If it is in my control, I like alcohol to be served at my shows. I find that it loosens people up. I have spoken to many performers who don't like it. They are concerned about the drunks. I have some drunks, but generally not many. I think they help add to show. I welcome the interaction.

TALES FROM THE ROAD

I had a drunk at one show that kept talking to me from the audience. Now notice, I didn't say heckling. He wasn't heckling me, he was helping me out in his own mind; just talking to me, so I called him on stage. He wasn't wearing shoes.

"Where are your shoes?" I asked.

"In the truck," he responded.

"Why are they in the truck?"

"They are new boots and they ain't broke in yet."

Everyone gets a laugh, he goes back to his seat and all is well. He got his time in front of the audience. I also reinforced the idea that audience interaction is welcome. Ignoring him wasn't an option. Everyone could hear him. If I tried to stifle him, then I am destroying the openness I want with my audience.

Tennyson Book Test

This book test never fails to get a good response. It really does seem quite impossible. The one downfall of this is that if people are seeing your show multiple times, they may quickly figure it out. However, there is a simple solution. You will make multiple force phrases, thus eliminating the weakness.

I love working with authentic items and this is one of those routines that uses an authentic, old and un-gimmicked book. This routine has gone through countless iteration throughout the years. I started using a Civil War Era book that I planned to use in the show based on fables, the *Fables of LaFontaine*. I used that book for many a year until it eventually fell apart. I looked on my bookshelves and eventually found a different book. It was book of Tennyson's poetry.

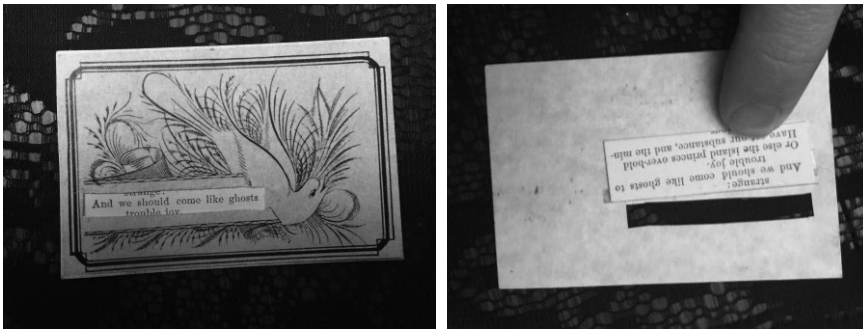
By pure chance, I photocopied a page to create the force card. The line I picked happened to be really funny and somewhat inappropriate in isolation. I kept it and worked jokes around it. That is one of the benefits to working material over and over. You learn new things, approaches and handlings. This became one of the driving forces in the creation of *Bibliomancer* and this one carried over into that show as well.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The performer calls someone on stage. That person selects a left or right hand column. They are given the option to change their mind. They then choose someone in the audience and that person selects a page number. They are given the option to change their mind. They then pick another person and they decide what phrase is picked. They can change their mind.

After three different choices are made, the spectator on stage reads the phrase out loud. The spectator is then directed to pick up an envelope that has been in full view the entire time. They pull out

the only piece of paper in the envelope, revealing the phrase selected by the three audience members at random.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: There is a Victorian calling card with a window cut in it. There is a flap attached to the card. The card contains the force phrase, which is written ahead of time and placed in an envelope on stage.



DETAILED EXPLANATION: First, you will need your card. You can use your business card if you like. I like using a Victorian calling card. These are easy to find pictures of on the Internet. The one I use is pictured above.

Once you have your card, you simply need to cut a slot or window in it. The size or length of the window is determined by the size of your text.

You will also need to make a color photocopy of the page of text you plan to use in the window. Cut out the lines you want to use and mount them to a piece of cardboard with spray adhesive or even a glue stick.

Now put a piece of adhesive tape on the back of the cardboard piece, with half of the tape exposed. Now line up your phrase in the window of the business card and stick it down. All you have to do now is flip it up to show the window empty and flip it down to show the force phrase. The photographs above should make the explanation a little easier to understand.

Sometimes the color doesn't exactly match. In these situations, you have to use a chalk pastel to match the colors. You can get these relatively cheaply at art supply stores. By applying a little bit of a yellow pastel and then rubbing vigorously with a finger, you can exactly match the color of the book.

The origin of this idea is fairly old. It first appeared in *The Phoenix*, No. 177 in 1949 as "Wordo" by Bruce Elliot. He used a paperclip as the forcing mechanism.

John Mullholland has a similar routine that can be found in *The Magic of John Mullholland* called "10,000 to 1." Mullholland added several steps and used an eraser shield as a forcing device.

Max Maven has also put his spin on the routine in "Isolation." He used a different forcing device than either of the previous routines and he did not keep the device hidden as others had. He also made use of multiple magazines. With my routine you could also do the same, using multiple books.

Barrie Richardson had his version in *Theater of the Mind*, directly crediting Mullholland and paying homage with the name "One in A Half Million." He uses the paperclip to find a phone number.

Banachek also used this technique both with a finger ring and a business card. He used both phone books and regular books. These two routines are "Word of the Ring" and "WATFATPB." Both of these routines are in his lecture notes.

BREAKDOWN OF SCRIPT: This script developed over a period of time. I will readily admit that Banachek's lecture and lecture notes led me to look into this and provided the technique. He did the routine using a phone book. I wanted to do something a bit different. In *The Odditorium*, is where this routine really developed into what it is today.

I need someone to come up and help.

In a moment, I am going to ask you to make some decisions. I want these to be your decisions, not my decisions. OK?

As I say the words, “your choice, not my choice,” I touch the spectator on the shoulder on the words “your choice.” I am playing around with NLP and anchoring techniques. None of this is relevant to the outcome of the routine. It is just my way of experimenting on stage with a live audience member. It is fun for me.

I have here a book that has been in my family for quite a while. It is a book of poetry by one of my favorite poets. Remember, I did say I was an English major. This is a book by Tennyson. Are you familiar with him?

I had a very elderly woman assisting me once with this. When I asked her if she was familiar with Tennyson, she asked me “Lord Alfred?” I asked her if she knew him personally.

This part of the routine is true. This happened in a performance at a high dollar social event. Her response was perfect. The audience got a laugh and I got a photo at that very moment.



I love times like this. A new line gathered and a picture captured at the very moment. You can see the photo on the left.

The book is divided into a left and a right side. I would like you to make a choice, left or right? Please state it out loud.

Here I watch them carefully and right before they speak, I continue, cutting them off. I know, not very polite for a genteel Southerner.

However, before you make your choice, let me tell you something. The type of person who would chose the right is someone who sticks to the safe side. They generally make the right decisions. The kind of person who would pick the left is someone a bit more adventurous. Life isn't just about following the safe path.

But the person who picks the right can also be seen as someone who is a bit boring. No sense of adventure. The person who picks the left could be seen as rash and reckless.

Now, don't let anything I have said sway your opinion, but...left or right?

During the above lines, I will get a laugh. I have also changed the language a bit over time, but none of it is relevant. You get the gist. As I say, the word “right,” I touch the spectator on the shoulder again. I am hoping they will pick right, but that is just because I am practicing NLP, not because it matters.

I then respond depending on which they chose; a bit of a mini-reading so to speak.

Right= strong willed and assured in choices
Left=called sinister. Evil intentions.

This book has 638 pages as you can see.

Please open the book and look through a few pages. All different, right? In a minute we are going to select a phrase. Come here and let me show you how it works. I will move my hand down the page and if I stop here, the phrase is ... and if I stop it here it is... You follow that? We are going to come back to this in a minute.

The more I started thinking about that scripting, I realized I needed to take out the lines about flipping through pages and making sure they are all different. As a whole, my approach to mentalism is to assume an air of naturalness. This isn't a magic show. Why wouldn't the book have all different pages? So, I took that line out, and now, I just flip through the book casually.

As I do the above lines, I demonstrate how the lines are selected based on what appears in the window. At this point, obviously, the flap is folded up, so the spectator can see the words moving by in the window. I want them to see this for two reasons. First, I want to condition them that there is nothing unusual about the card. Secondly, I want to make sure it is clear how they are to read the phrase.

Also notice that I never mention the card. This is a bit of dual reality so to speak. The spectator clearly sees the card and there is no doubt there is one. However, I never mention it to the audience. I don't try to hide it either though. If they see it, it is no big deal. I want it to fly by though. If no one knows there is a card, then that is one less possible solution.

I need someone else in the audience to help. Please select someone. Name what they are wearing, please. Sir, you can stay seated. Look at me please. Can you please select a page number, any number between one and 638?

By having the spectator on stage pick the second person to assist, it gets rid of any suggestions of stooges and lets the person on stage have a bit of fun at the same time.

When I am asking the spectator to pick a page number I am vaguely moving my finger in the air as if making figures of numbers. This bit is directly from Banachek and I think it to be very clever.

PERFORMANCE TIPS

I learned that if you don't direct your spectator to be specific about what the person is wearing, you will get something like; "that person up there," as they point into the dark. That is not very helpful.

Even asking them to name clothes, they will probably point, so that will make things easier and less awkward.

123? That was an example of freewill, right? That was a free choice, correct? I am not surprised you picked that page. You see when I asked you to pick a page, I gestured in the air with my finger and subtly made the gesture of 123. You see, I made you choose that number. Would you like to stick with that number or pick another one?

During these lines is when I flip the flap down. You can do it with one hand. It is very simple.

Giving the spectator a chance to change their mind again reinforces the idea that this is random. I have two different responses based on the response of the spectator.

(If No.) I knew you would choose another one which is why I asked if you wanted to change. You are very independent and don't like being told what to do, even if it is subconsciously.

(If stay) I knew you would stick with this number. You are very self-assured and though you occasionally question yourself, you usually know that you make the right decisions and you stick by them.

Thank you. Give him a round of applause, everyone.

I now address my spectator on stage.

Now that we have a page, please open the book to that page and hand me the book.

While the spectator is doing that, I now address the person who just picked a page number.

Now choose another person in the audience. Again, state what they are wearing so that there is no confusion.

Addressing the third spectator, I state:

I am going to move my hand down the page. At any point, after I say start, I want you to say stop. Does that make sense? Good.

Now addressing the person on stage with me, I say:

Your job is to watch my hand and make sure that I stop when they tell me to stop, OK?

This helps to reinforce to the spectator on stage that the card is legit. I am asking them to watch my hand. My hand is on the card. I am inviting scrutiny. Notice that I use the word “hand,” not “card,” so to the audience it is just my hand and the person on stage is making sure everything is fair and there is no cheating.

The flap has been flipped down. I cover the opening in the window with my hand, so while the spectator on stage may be staring at my hand it is covering the window, so they can't see that the words aren't changing. I think it is rather bold to have them stare right at the bit of kit that you are using to create your deception. However, I also think that this further establishes that the card is innocent. Why would you have someone stare at it if it was gimmicked?

Tell me when you want me to stop.

That felt like freewill as well didn't it? I would call it fate, but it really isn't. You see when I looked up and made eye contact, you told me to stop. People usually follow instruction when you look them in the eye. Do you want to keep going or have me start over or stay where we are?

Again, here, the third spectator can change their mind if they like and we can go further down the page or start over. Either way, when this is done, I have to make sure the card is straight and lined up with the text. I move my hand off of the card, while using my left hand to shield the card from the eyes of the spectator until I can get the window lined up properly. You don't need crooked text or text that doesn't line up with the rest of the book. Once it is straight, I then address the spectator on stage.

Please read aloud the selection in the book.

The selection in my book is “and tender curving lines of creamy spray.” This is actually a line from “The Lotos Eaters” from Tennyson. It always gets a laugh. If I am doing corporate work, I change it. I don't want to present any blue material. Again, this might be acceptable elsewhere, but in the South I have to be careful.

I then look at the book and at the spectator while repeating the line.

Are we sure this is Tennyson? It sounds more like Lord Byron.

This is another of those lines that is for me. I deliver the line and then wait for the two or three people who laugh. Most people don't get it. I have my Bachelors degree in English and I appreciate being able to make a Victorian literature joke. This is another of those lines that is really more for me.

I am so glad someone got that. See that is a literary joke. This is where I stratify my audience. I know who reads or got a degree in English.

OK, so no one feels left out, it sounds more like Penthouse.

Obviously, I also leave the above lines out if I am doing corporate work.

I then turn back to my spectator on stage.

I have a sealed envelope, which has been in full view on stage. Can you please go and get that envelope and bring it up here.

Please confirm there is but one piece of paper in there.

Please open the envelope and show everyone the words written on the paper.

Often before the paper is turned around, you have people in the audience saying, “no way,” and the like. This is a great moment. I used to have the spectator read the words out loud, but the problem with that is they take too long staring in amazement with the audience wondering what they are looking at. Having them turn it around allows everyone to share in the moment.

If you would like to see a performance of the routine, you can do so at the below address or just scan the QR code.

<https://youtu.be/0CMXQmPCMLo>



My Kind of Card Trick

I don't do card tricks. I am not taking the mentalist approach that cards don't belong in mentalism; I just don't like card tricks. That's just a personal preference. This is the closest that I get to a card trick. I like the basic idea of a card at any number. Then it occurred to me that doing a kind of ACAAN without cards would appeal to me more. A real mindreader would just have someone pick a card in their head. There wouldn't be any cards. This is what drove me and created my parameters. The final version really isn't ACAAN but that is where it started.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: A spectator is called on stage and asked to enter into a game with the Devil in which the spectator has to determine the one card that the Devil selected before the game started.

Cards are quickly eliminated by the spectator, leaving him with a choice of any card in a suit. The spectator names a card. The performer goes to a box that was in view the full time. The box is opened and an envelope and a letter opener are removed.

The sealed envelope is opened. The spectator removes a piece of paper which was sealed within. On it is written the card that the spectator names.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: First, you eliminate cards quickly, using basic wording and magician's choice. You want to eliminate half of the deck with the first question, and then eliminate one suit. This now allows the spectator a free choice of any card in the remaining suit.

The envelope in the box has most of the prediction prewritten. There is a space for the writing of the selected card. This is done with a nail writer.

DETAILED EXPLANATION: I know that many will not like this routine or two reasons. First, the equivoque isn't always completely clean. Secondly a lot of people don't like nail writers. I personally enjoy routines where there are a lot of decisions being made by the spectator and you aren't sure exactly where it will go. One of my friends and long time light and sound guy described my show as a "choose your own adventure" show, like the books from the 1980s. If you aren't familiar with those, you get to choose how the story progressed. You would pick a page number based on your decision and turn there. However, regardless of your choice, they always ended the same way.



The box that I use. The prediction is written beforehand and there is a space left to write the number. In the picture above, only the "4" is nailwritten. This is then sealed in an envelope with a window cut to nail write the number. My nailwriter and letter opener are also in the box.

So, do you really have freewill even if there are no outside factors controlling your choices? You are completely different and unique because of your culture, your upbringing and your own unique brain chemistry. These things all combine to create what is viewed as your personality. You make choices based on your personality. In fact, you are a slave to your personality and it forces you to make certain choices.

When psychologists want to read someone, for instance to tell if they are lying, they need to get a baseline. They need to see how this person normally responds. I want to do the same, but I have a leg up. I watched everyone as they came in. I listened to everyone...without them knowing. Kinda creepy, huh?

Anyway, there is one person I watched enough that I think I know how he will respond in certain situations.

I like having pseudo explanations for how some things are done. This is why I have the wording about watching and listening.

Sir, we didn't speak about this earlier tonight did we?

Please, for God's sake, refrain from using the "you seem pretty happy about that" line here.

You didn't know I was going to call you up here, did you?

Can you read minds?

Do you ever consider yourself a dreamer? Do you sometimes have flights of fancy? I want you to take advantage of that. Please close your eyes.

Have you ever been hypnotized? We are going to do a quick relaxation technique. I won't hypnotize you and make you sing Lady Gaga or bark like a dog....unless the audience wants me to.

Here I look at the audience and let them start cheering, clapping or whatever.

No, I'm kidding. I won't embarrass you like that.

Here I go into a short hypnotic induction. I won't include a script as it is very basic and if you have any familiarity with hypnosis you will know some inductions. It is for relaxation and isn't really about hypnosis.

Now I want you to visualize that you are in a casino. You walk up to blackjack table and have a seat. The dealer sits down across from you and he says "So, what's your name?" You reply:

I wait for the spectator to state their name. Often they don't realize that you are prompting them for their name and you get a laugh from your audience as you stand there looking at the spectator until they realize what you want from them.

He says, "Hello, Leon, I'm Ryan Reynolds."

You find this even stranger. You are thinking, "this man isn't nearly hot enough to be Ryan Reynolds. Ryan Reynolds is smoking. His abs...oh man."

Leon, I'm not here to judge you. This is your fantasy. Now you feel a foot rub up your leg. No, no just kidding.

It should go without saying that I call a man up for this routine. I look for someone who looks kind of uptight. They tend to be the best spectator for these lines.

The dealer spreads a deck of cards across the table. The cards are separated by color. The dealer looks at you and says "Pick a color." You say:

Here is the start of the equivoque. It doesn't matter what color the spectator says. You just need to be ready with the response.

Very good. The dealer sweeps all of the (name the color they chose) cards up into a pile. Do you want these or do you want me to have them?

The next bit of wording depends on which choice they made.

If they say red:

1. They want to keep them: *You want to keep the red cards. Those are yours. You can put them in your pocket as a souvenir. He then pushes all the black cards to the middle of the table.*
2. They want you to have them: *Very good. These are mine. The dealer sweeps the red cards to his side of the table, gathering them in a neat stack and puts them aside. He then pushes all the black cards to the middle of the table.*

If they say black:

1. They want to keep them: *The dealer pushes all of the black cards to you. You wanted the black cards. They are yours.*
2. They want you to have them: *The dealer takes the cards and spreads them out on the table in front of you. Very well, these are the cards we will use.*

This sounds more complicated than it really is. We want to use the black cards. Therefore, if they pick black, then it is really irrelevant whether they want to keep them or give them to you. They have selected the cards that we want them to use.

If they select red, then we need to get those out of the picture. Again, the selection of whether they want them or want you to have them is still irrelevant. I have this as part of the script because it gives the illusion of more choices. Illusion really isn't

the right word, because it is a free choice. It is just that you are controlling the outcome. At this point, the spectator has no clue what is going on, so there is nothing to be suspicious about.

We now have eliminated half of the cards and we have the color we want on the table. We now need to eliminate the clubs in the same manner.

The dealer looks at your and laughs. A deep disturbing laugh. There is a flash of smoke and Ryan Reynolds is no longer in front of you. Oh no. It is the Devil.

Ha, ha, I am actually the Devil and you have entered into a little game of chance with me. You see before we started, I wrote down one card. One card out of 52. If you can guess my one card, then you win...one million dollars. However, if you lose, then I get...your soul.

This is done in an overly dramatic and tongue in cheek manner. Remember that before now, the spectator doesn't know what we are doing. That allows the next part of the equivoque to be a bit disguised. Also, it gives a space in time between the first choice and the upcoming second choice. A bit of humor also helps distract the audience's memory of what just transpired.

Now, I helped you by eliminating half of the cards. Let's hope you chose wisely.

We have the black cards in front of us. This choice works a little different, but I will help make this easier again. We have clubs and we have spades. Make a choice.

The choice they make is again irrelevant because you will control the outcome. Notice also, that I specifically say, "this choice works a little different."

If spades: *Very well. We will use the spades.*

If clubs: *Very well, we will get rid of the clubs.*

At this point, it seems like an easy choice. You just said “make a choice” without saying what would happen when that choice was made. Obviously, it is better if they pick the spades. One of the things I have done to help suggest this is to say those lines with my hands near my face. They are held in the shape of a spade. It isn’t a particularly unusual way to hold your hands. It is very similar to “steepleing;” the power hand gesture that is used. If you aren’t familiar with body language, I would suggest you do some reading on it. Using body language can be extremely powerful in your performances.

Now, I have helped you all I am going to help you. You have a choice of any one of those cards left in front of you. You can pick any card from the 2 through the Ace of Spades.

The spectator will now name their card.

The Devil disappears in another puff of smoke.

Now, was that a fun trip? Could you really visualize the scene in front of you?

You chose the four of spades. This was a free choice; one card out of fifty-two possible cards.

Of course, this is a bald faced lie. They had a choice of one out of thirteen. Which sounds better, a one in thirteen choice or a one in fifty two choice? Your words can influence the perception of what actually happened. Use them.

As I am saying the below lines, I walk to my table with the box on it, open the box and remove the envelope. At the same time, I slip on the nail writer. I set it in the box before performance so that it is easy to slip on.

As you all came in tonight, I watched people. I found someone that I thought I could make a connection with. Someone I could lead to a certain card. Now, the thing is, I didn’t know

which card until I saw that person. Do you know who that person was?

Yes, that person was you. I quickly jotted down a card right before I came on stage. I then slipped my prediction in an envelope and put it in the box. The whole time this sealed envelope has been in this closed box in view of the audience.

As I am saying these words, I am holding the envelope in front of me, and nail writing their selection. Because I am “displaying” the envelope to the audience, it doesn’t seem like an odd way to hold it.

Also, I am only making a few strokes so it happens very quickly. If they pick a face card, I don’t write the whole name, just a J, Q, K or A.

I want to show you what was written on it.

As I say these words, I hold the envelope up in my left hand so it is in view of the audience. I reach into the box to get the letter opener, at the same time ditching the nail writer. Getting a letter opener gives a good excuse for reaching into the box. However, this isn’t the only reason for this. A letter opener really is needed so you don’t fumble around trying to open the envelope or tear your prediction. I learned tis through experience.

I want to keep the envelope in full view because I don’t want the audience to think there is any funny business going on. The “moves” have already happened.

I then open the envelope. Keeping the window face down, I ask the spectator to remove the paper from the envelope. By having them remove the paper, it makes it look very fair. Why would I let a spectator get into an envelope if something was sneaky about it?

I then ask the spectator to read what is written on the card. Even in those situations where I just write J, Q, K or A, I have

virtually always had the spectator read the entire word, rather than the letter, as if it is written out. One time I had a spectator pause, and I just said “Queen, it says queen, correct?”

When he confirmed it, I just said, “sorry about my sloppy handwriting.” That was all of the cover I needed.

Ugly Kid

This is a fairly ridiculous and fun routine that I dreamed up one night while working on a project with my daughter in which we were cutting out pictures of babies. I hated looking at all of these pictures of all of these cute kids. Part of this script is based on real life, since that is where it originated.

I also wanted something that injected a lot of humor into the show. It also makes people slightly uncomfortable, as there are sexual references and cursing people you hate with ugly kids. I absolutely love this one. You may not as it can be seen in a negative light. A lot depends on your persona and how you handle it. Read through the script and decide for yourself. At the end, I provide a link to a performance of the routine. Watch that and see if you feel that it is too negative.

My good friend Joe Diamond asked me to market this, but I don't have the energy to create all of the sets. I will explain the working and how to make your own set.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: A spectator who thinks of their enemy is called on stage. It is explained that thinking evil thoughts during pregnancy can manifest itself in the form of an ugly child.

The spectator is asked to reach into a clear bag full of numbers and pick one. The number she picks matches the page number of a truly ugly baby, proving the theory that evil thoughts can create an ugly kid.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: This is as simple as it gets. You have a clear force bag. The front has all different numbers and the back has all the same. You can buy clear force bags for a good amount of money (for decent looking ones) or you can just make your own.

I like props that look like real things, not props. The solution is to make a force bag out of two heavy-duty gallon size zip lock bags. Here is how it works. Take one bag and cut the zippers off the top. Next, you need to slice down the side of the inner bag. Don't cut much at all, just enough to open the side. You want it to nest cleanly in the other bag.

You can buy plastic bag sealers to reseal the bag, but I went with the low tech method. Using a lighter, and a light touch, you can melt the side of the bag back together. Once you have it melted together, place this bag inside the outer bag and tape the back wall of the inner bag to the back wall of the outer back. Go all the way across the top using packaging tape. This keeps the inner bag from moving and makes two pockets.

Now, put your tiles with numbers in the front and back pockets. Fill the front pocket slightly higher. This is the one with all of the differently numbered tiles. The back pocket will be tiles with all of the same numbers.

For the tiles, I ordered math color tiles for teachers. I have no clue what they are used for, but they are different colored plastic tiles. It is visual, cheap, they will last and they look good. You can do an Internet search and find them easily. I then wrote various numbers on them with a permanent marker.

Finally, there is the book. I made the book by purchasing a sketchbook. I then went through a stack of baby magazines cutting out pictures of cute babies. I really did have my daughter helping me. I then pasted in pictures of some horrific babies and labeled the front.

BREAKDOWN OF SCRIPT: This routine was the beginning of the second half of the show after the intermission. I wanted to start the show again with some of the same ideas that drove the beginning of the show. I wanted to break down that fourth wall, have something a little uncomfortable, get everyone involved and have humor. I also wanted to reinforce my theme.

Let's return to fate and freewill for a moment. We have looked at freewill some but we have neglected fate so far. Fate is sometimes also seen as coincidence or chance. Let me give you a very concrete example. Your birth. You can't control when you are born and you can't control who your parents are. It is simply out of your hands, it is fate.

By the same token, your parents didn't get to choose who you are, what you look like or your personality. Some things can be changed but your looks, well either you are born lucky or not. Thankfully, for ugly babies, beauty truly is in the eye of the beholder.

At this point, I always wait for the nervous laughter from the audience. I often follow it up by saying, "what, are ugly babies wrong to laugh at? I think it is funny." This puts those laughing at ease and tends to make those who aren't laughing a little more uncomfortable. Again, I like making the audience a bit uncomfortable at times. I feel that art should challenge people. Also, everyone has thought that someone's baby is ugly. You just aren't supposed to say it.

So picking your perfect child would be too easy. Nice symmetrical face, nothing too big or too small. All of the facial features in the right spot. But how about the ugliest child in the world? That would be a lot more fun to create, right? Think about a person you would like to inflict this on. Think about what they may have done to make you want to wish this on them. I know there is someone you wish would have the ugliest child in the world. What is that terrible?

I encourage my audience to close their eyes and really think about someone they don't like. I want them to participate. I want them to really imagine that ugly child. I then call someone on stage. I pick the prettiest girl in the audience. People generally want to look at them and it makes the upcoming jokes easier. You will see what I mean, especially after you read the Tales From the Road section.

Indulge me in being a bit mean for just a few minutes. It's all in fun. Think about someone that you really don't like. Think about their face, really picture it. Concentrate on them and what they did to make you mad. Keep thinking about that.

There is something in the genetic code of women. It starts when they are little bitty. When they see a cute kid what do they do?

Here, I wait for the audience to go “ahhh” which they do readily. I'm not sure, but I strongly believe this may be cultural. In America, or at least the South, this is the standard response.

Right, they say ahhh. My daughter started doing this when she was about three or four. She wanted to do a daddy-daughter project and make a book of cute babies. Well, that is too boring. So, I came up with this idea.

I then show the cover of the book, which says “98 Cute Babies and 3 Ugly Ones.” I then address my spectator.

Did you play along with me and think of that someone you really don't like? Who is it? I'm just kidding. Don't tell me. There is an old wives tale that when you were pregnant, if you had evil thoughts, you can make an ugly baby. Uh-oh. You aren't pregnant now, are you?

You usually get a good reaction when you ask the spectator if they are pregnant.

Whew, I would hate to be responsible if you had an ugly baby. I mean, not that I would be responsible, but... Let's just move on.

I have a bag up here that is filled with numbered tiles. There is a tile for each of the numbers of this book. I could just ask you to choose a number, but that would be freewill. You see, I want fate to decide which number you choose. In a minute, I am going to ask you to reach in and select a tile, any one that you want. In fact, as you pick one, you can drop it and select another on.

However, once your hand comes out of the bag, I want you to close it around that tile.

Please select a tile.

At this point, you slip your hand into the back pocket of the bag, holding the front of the inner bag against the inner wall, so they can only choose from the back pocket, which has all of the same numbers.

You were thinking those thoughts and then you selected a tile. That tile has what number on it?

Number 34. Let's take a look at page 33. Cute kid, right? How about page 35? Another cute kid. But you chose 34. On page 34? No one could claim this baby as cute.

I then show them the picture of the evil baby seen below.



TALES FROM THE ROAD

Be careful how you pick audience members. It is particularly important when you are onstage with the lights in your eyes and they are further back.

I called on a young woman to assist with this one. I couldn't really see her that well and I had already called everyone near the front. As she approached the stage, I realized that I was looking at perhaps, one of the most unattractive women ever. I also think she was developmentally delayed.

My director got a big smile on his face as he was anticipating watching me squirm. I couldn't even do all of the lines. It was just too uncomfortable.

That one taught me to pick out my pretty girl first and save her for this routine. It is much easier to make pregnancy jokes that way. In what is already an edgy routine, I want to stay away from anything that could be seen as overtly "mean," especially when using audience members.

To watch the performance video, go to the link below or use the QR code.

<https://youtu.be/72hWip6db78>



The End of Summer

This became one of my signature pieces for a while. One of the routines I perform in *The Odditorium* is hand in animal trap. Going back to the idea of “why” I thought why would someone put their hand in an animal trap? I don’t like the idea of doing stunts just for the sake of doing them. There needs to be a motivation. If it was to retrieve something valuable, then that would be a good reason to put your hand in a trap.

So I started thinking about good options and good stories and a story from my youth came to mind. This story has been told, retold, and reworked, until it arrived in the final version below. The version below is longer than what I use in my show.

I am including this version because it was broadcast over NPR and it won as one of the top six stories of the year, out of over 150 stories, which were submitted to Tales from the South, which is a live program where storytellers read their stories to live audiences. This is published in a compilation and re-broadcast as part of the Best of 2014 show.

I am also including this is to show that you should think of your performances as more than just mentalism, or sideshow, or magic. How can your performances translate into other areas of entertainment? Can your routines stand alone without the “trick?” At the conclusion, I will address the changes for stage performance.

I must have been about eight when I watched my Uncle Avery stomp a copperhead to death with his boot heel. He pulled out a pocket knife and cut the belly of the snake open. Baby copperheads raced everywhere and he danced one of the finest jigs I have ever seen as he stomped on all of those snakes.

Uncle Avery was a bit of an anomaly for Greasy Creek, Kentucky. This is where we spend our summer vacation every

year. Back then everyone in Arkansas knew that if your parents had a little money you went camping or went to Hot Springs. If your family had a little more money, you got to go to Branson or Dallas, which meant Silver Dollar City or Six Flags. If your parents had a lot of money, or if you had kind grandparents or otherwise were just plain lucky, you got to go to Florida or maybe the Holy Grail of all summer vacations, Disney World.

But not my family. We got to go to Greasy Creek, Kentucky, where my Dad's family is from. And I felt like the luckiest kid on the planet.

Greasy Creek was like something out of a movie. This would have been a location scout's dream for the perfect hillbilly locale. This is a land where moonshine flowed freely. There were no questions about your religion or which church you went to because there was only one; the Old Regular Baptist Church. Everyone lived "up the holler." People would ask which family you were from. There were only about four families left and they were curious as to how you were related to them, because undoubtedly you were, in some manner.

While Greasy Creek may not have been the ideal locale for a young boy's summer vacation, there was some fun to be had. I liked to stay at my Uncle Avery and Aunt Ola's house. Now Ola's name was spelled O-L-A but I never heard a single person ever call her Ola, it was pronounced "Olie."

And then there was Uncle Avery. One of the reasons he was an anomaly for the area was that he left, and still came back. Most people who managed to escape didn't make a return. However, he signed up for the military, did his tour of duty in World War Two and returned. He built a fine house, planted fruit trees and dug a well that provided clean cold water. His home may have been the nicest in Greasy Creek. He vowed to never leave again. He saw more of the world than he wanted to in a way that might spoil a lot of people from wanting to see any more.

My relatives now tell me that I look like him. He was one of the handsomest men I had ever seen. He also had a tattoo. In this day and age when every other person has a tattoo, it might not sound unusual. There weren't any tattoo parlors in Greasy Creek so anyone with a tattoo had obviously left. I remember being a very young child and sitting in his lap, running my fingers over the watery blue lines of the faded tattoo. It was a naked woman in a martini glass with the words "man's ruin" written underneath. At the time, I certainly didn't get it. Now, I wouldn't mind having that tattoo.

Finally, he didn't have children. In an area where there are no theaters, no shopping, no TV, children were the natural outcome of one of the sole sources of entertainment. To be childless was quite unusual.

Because of that, or perhaps in spite of it, Uncle Avery was very tolerant of me following him around, and follow him around I did. He seemed to me to be one of the biggest, toughest and strongest men I had ever seen.

One time I sat on a stool as he shod a horse. He somehow managed to hammer one of the horse shoe nails through his thumb. He simply pulled the nail out with a claw hammer, poured some moonshine on it, and went back to shoeing. That was tough. The moonshine bottle was half empty so that may have had something to do with it.

Until I was about eight or so I didn't know what a real piggy back ride was. He would place me on the back of a muddy sow and tell me to hold on. This was the children's version of bull riding. A pig will run and buck and do everything in its power to get that little human off his back. This would always end with me in a pile of, what I also hoped was just mud, in a pig sty with my uncle letting out his big booming laugh.

Uncle Avery and I had a game we would play. He had an old walking liberty silver dollar. It was a coin I wanted. He told me that if I could grab it, it was mine. He would place the coin in his

palm inviting me to grab it, then snap his hand closed before I could do so. We played this game every summer. Again, he didn't have children, so he didn't understand the concept of letting a child win.

The one good thing about this game is that it gave me something to look forward to every summer. As I got older I realized I was probably getting a year closer to being able to move fast enough to make that coin mine.

It was finally the summer between sixth and seventh grade. This was my summer. The silver dollar was going to be mine. I was bigger and faster.

After making the long road trip to Kentucky, the first thing I did was took the hike up the holler to my Uncle Avery's house. Nothing could have prepared me for what I saw. I walked in and he was lying in a bed in his living room. He couldn't speak, or eat and barely could move. He had Lou Gehrig's Disease, also known as ALS. He didn't want anyone to know how bad he was. He didn't want anyone to worry. We communicated by writing on the children's magic slates. I couldn't stay long. I didn't want to see that strength and power sapped, taken from this person lying immobile in front of me.

That was the last Summer I saw Uncle Avery. He died a few months later. My aunt Ola sent me the coin along with a letter. Only then did I find out it had been his good luck charm in World War Two. He had kept it in his pocket his entire life. Mountain people are often very superstitious. She felt the luck had run out.

I still have that coin. Every once in a while I'll pull it out of my pocket, look at it, and think of my uncle. I think about that game we played, his large, calloused hands too fast for a boy's to catch. And I realize that finally getting that coin was a turning point, that last summer when childhood ended.

You can watch a video performance of the reading of the script at link below or use the QR code to take you there.

<https://youtu.be/Z1v6XxzWRJw>



As I said there are a few variations to this. When I am doing this in a show, I often shorten the story. Also, I continue on.

When I was younger I started playing football and doing martial arts and I tried to think of ways I could get better and faster. I looked around room and found something. Believe it or not, I had some unusual hobbies as a kid. This is what I found.

At this point, I hold up the animal trap.

I thought about my uncle and how tough he was and I thought about the phrases, “no pain no gain” and “no risk, no reward.”

I now demonstrate how the trap works, using a pretzel stick. Many people don’t recognize it is a pretzel stick. They think it is wood, making the trap look much more dangerous. When I set it I move it very, very carefully as if the trap is on a hair trigger. I let my body language sell how dangerous this thing can be.



Extracting my hand from an animal trap. That is a picture of my uncle in the foreground.

I set the trap a second time and then place the coin on the trigger. At this point, I will get murmuring in the audience as they realize what I am about to do. Now keep in mind, this routine isn't structured as a "look what I can do" routine, so people do expect me to get the coin from the trap.

I really take my time and build up the moment before I put my hand in the trap.

I used to rush it, but this is where the real tension is in the routine, so I don't rush this moment any longer.

After the trap goes off and my hand is in it, I try to really sell the pain and the disappointment since I "messed up."

People don't really know what to think. It is a beautiful moment because people are so dumbstruck. Sometimes, people applaud, which I always find odd. When they do so, I say "thank you for applauding my failure."

I then move to my finishing line.

You know, I never did figure out how to get the coin out of this stupid trap, but I bet my uncle is laughing watching me try.

I had one other variation of this I added during some Halloween shows, that I have been keeping in. I show a bell that

my uncle would ring when he needed help. I walk over and ring the bell and hang it back on its hanger. Then at the end of the routine, I change my wording slightly.

You know, I never did figure out how to get the coin out of this stupid trap, but I bet my uncle is laughing watching me try. Uncle Avery are you there?

Then, the bell rings. It really gets a good response. This is done with a Hobbs Box from Outlaw. My girlfriend hits the button to ring the bell, so I am clean.

A Sweeter Woman

I really enjoy being able to interact with audience members and make them the center of the show. This routine has five people on stage at the same time. I really like to improvise and see what happens. This was a later addition to my show. I like the routine and each time I perform it, I think it gets a little better.

Originally, I was thinking of doing something along the lines of “Karotsuke,” which is an oft used routine originated by Max Maven. However, as I started looking around at what I had, I decided that a handmade velvet switch bag I had would work perfectly well.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The performer talks about fate and love and lust and calls five women to the stage. Each of them is to reach into a bag and remove a small doll. One of the dolls has an “X” on it. The performer tries to determine who has the “X” while instructing them to lie to him.

In the end he successfully picks the one holding the doll with the X.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: You force the doll with the X using a force bag. That’s it. The rest is just performance.

The bag and the small dolls were handmade. Look to Etsy if you don’t have a friend or family member to make something. Most of the people on Etsy are artisans and can custom make whatever you want. That is where my dolls and the bag came from.

DETAILED EXPLANATION: There isn’t a whole lot to explain, so this will consist primarily of the script.

You know people often try to change their fate. They try to do it through lies, through deception. But that can create incredible problems.

Raise your hand if you think telling a little white lie can be good if it protects someone.

Keep your hands up if you think that telling an even bigger lie could be a good thing if it protects someone else?

What if it is only protecting you?

One final show of hands. How many here are married? How many have been married for more than ten years?

How many here are currently dating someone?

OK, I won't ask for a show of hands for anything else.

For those who have recently started dating, you know that there is a wonderful feeling with new romance. There is fear, excitement, and exhilaration. Then that feeling starts to grow into something different. It is a deeper love.

It is something beautiful and deep, something that can be fulfilling and last forever. Something that.....

At this point, I have the song "The Thrill is Gone" start playing. It starts quietly, slowly growing louder until I am almost having to yell over it. I give my sound guy a stern look and then the music cuts off.

OK, let's face it we all want the thrill. Sometimes you can recapture a bit of that spark. Sometimes it is in your relationship and sometimes...it isn't. I won't ask for a raise of hands, but have you seen someone across the room at a party, a bar, somewhere. Your eyes meet and there is an instant spark. It seems so powerful that you have to look away. You are sure everyone can see the heat.

Have you ever gone further with it? I don't mean cheating necessarily, but maybe you walked over there and spoke to the person. A little light flirting. It was meaningless, but that person...they stuck in your head. You were thinking about them.

Maybe you did take it further. Maybe you kissed, maybe you...is any of it cheating?

I need five women up here. I won't ask you any personal questions about what you may or may not have done. However, I will ask you a different question. A simple yes or no question and one that you don't even have to answer honestly. You can lie to me if you prefer.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, everyone has different standards of beauty. I have a bag here and in each bag is a little doll. One of the dolls, and only one, has an X on it. I want each of you to reach in and grab one of the dolls, but don't let anyone see what you have.

I say the above two lines as I am passing out the first two dolls. Then I pause and turn the bag around in preparation for the force.

Now if you happen to get the doll with the X, I want you to really image that is the ugliest person you have ever seen. If you have the ones without the X...

Turn the bag back around again.

Well, those are the most beautiful people that you have ever seen. I want you to really project that beautiful person or that ugly person. That beautiful person can be your spouse, a movie star, it could be me. In a moment I will ask you if your person is beautiful or ugly. You can lie or tell the truth, I don't care.

A Brief Aside on Audience Management

When I am watching my audience fill in a room, I often get an idea of who I would like to bring up on stage. This is a good thing to do in most shows. It keeps dead time down, you aren't looking for someone and perhaps most importantly, if one of your previously selected assistants doesn't appear to work out, you can possibly catch that beforehand. In other words, if the lady you had chosen in your mind now appears drunk, or challenging your routines, for example, you can choose someone else.

For this routine, I like to pick different people that seem that they would provide contrast and texture. For example, if a lady has on a lot of makeup and a loud outfit; something with animal prints or glitter, then can probably safely bet that she is outgoing and willing to speak up. I want two of those if I can find them. I want people on stage who aren't timid and are willing to "perform" when given the chance.

Next I want someone who seems reserved. I am looking for someone without a lot of makeup. I am looking for conservative dress. I don't want someone who is timid though. I don't want them uncomfortable on the stage. In my experience, if they are truly terrified of being on stage, they will tell you "no" immediately. I don't make an issue out of it and I don't try to get them up. I just move on to someone else.

Finally, I get two women up together who look like friends or mother and daughter. Two women who know each other well. I typically reserve the doll for one of them. Each of these choices are deliberate. I have lines that are somewhat stock that I like to use with each of them.

I start by speaking with the person who is more reserved. I always ask a name. I then ask her if the doll she has is beautiful. I then give a short reading. Something along the following lines:

You strike me as someone who values your personal time. While you like to be among friends, there are times you would rather just sit on the couch. I see you in a job that allows you to help others. You enjoy your role as a helper. What is it that you do?

I then allow her to answer. It is surprising how often the above reading is correct.

You are also a very honest person, one who wouldn't lie, at least not well. You can return to your seat.

Of course, the above lines would need to be altered depending on whether she did lie or not. Often this person doesn't lie though.

I now move onto one of my outgoing ladies. I ask them their name and then whether they have a beautiful or ugly doll. Obviously, this is just a yes or no question. I then move to the other one, asking the same. I get their names and now feign difficulty determining who is a liar. I also usually make a joke about them both having a lot of experience at lying saying something about hiding things from parents and sneaking out when they were younger.

I then move to the two who know one another.

Now you two know one another. How long have you been friends?

I will say this line regardless of what I believe the relationship to be. It sets up a funny line if they say they are mother and daughter. Also, I learned after one mishap to not assume one is the mother and other the daughter. Someone is going to be offended if they are just friends.

However, if they say that they are mother and daughter, they will tell you so. I follow up with this line:

Oh, OK. How long have you been mother and daughter?

I then talk to them about how well they must know one another and that one of them can probably tell when the other is lying, but not to give anything away. I then ask them both if they have the beautiful man. I immediately dismiss one of them, assuming I can. I want to save the doll with the X for last.

Now it is back to the two outgoing women. Then I ask random questions. It may be your job, your favorite food, your best friend's name, the name of a childhood pet. I have a lot of byplay and fun with it. I give pseudo explanations of what their answers mean. I then eliminate one of them.

Down to the last two, a few more ridiculous questions and the last two are revealed, showing that you know who had the doll with the X, the ugly doll. Then I finish with my last line.

Men, don't you wish you could always do that with your women? I can teach you how after the show for the right price.

My original script had a second part to the routine. I decided to drop it because it seemed too much like a magic trick, but I will include it here in case it appeals to you.

Now, I do have a little confession to make. Those little dolls? That is what a real voodoo doll looks like. Women, those of you with the regular dolls, you will all be blessed with love and happiness.

However, you my dear? I am sorry but that one was cursed. I feel obliged to remove the curse but I will do you one better. I will also remove a fear.

I want to give you this card. Please write down your fear. When we write things, it allows us to concentrate on them. When you are done fold it, please.

TALES FROM THE ROAD

Mentalists often have a problem of thinking of themselves as quite clever. Sometimes I succumb to this as well. I was performing this routine once and after all of the dolls were passed out, I told the people that they could even exchange them with someone else while my back was turned. Why I thought I could do that, I have no idea. So right after those words came out of my mouth, I realized what a jam I was in. What was I going to do? Panic was starting to set in.

I shut my brain off and listened carefully. OK, I didn't hear any movement on stage at all. I asked if everyone was done. They said yes. OK, so no movement means no exchanges, unless it was with the person next to them. There were two girls on stage who knew one another and they were side by side. I gave the X doll to one of them and thankfully she was on the end. I knew they could have possibly switched but one of them had to be the one with the doll.

I went through the routine eliminating the others. I was down to the last two girls. I asked one of them if they switched, reminding them they could lie. The look on her face gave it away and I knew who had the one with the X. This was a real case of having to read body language and following my instinct.

The picture on the following page also chronicled that very moment of me sweating it out trying to figure out who had the X.



Here I was going to get a peek. Personally, I was going to use Acidus Novus. This isn't my method, so it is one I won't reveal. However, any method would work.

At this point, I was going to do a "cleansing ritual" of some kind. I hadn't really gotten to what. Then, I would wave the card through the flame of a candle. If you aren't familiar with Frixion pens, you can get them at office supply stores. They are erasable ink. The ink is erased through heat. The heat of the candle flame will make the ink invisible, causing it to disappear.

I have now removed any lingering curse from the doll. And, you are no longer afraid of spiders. Your fear has vanished.

You wrote spiders, correct? Please show it to everyone.

Of course, as she opens it to show everyone, there is another surprise as the writing is gone.

One Ahead

I love one ahead routines. I always have loved them. A very basic routine from Mark Wilson's magic book was the very first mentalism routine I ever performed at a talent show at a summer camp. I love them so much, I use different techniques to do one ahead more than once in the show. I know conventional wisdom is don't use the same technique twice, but I use them in very different ways.

If for some reason, you are unfamiliar with one ahead routines, the broad definition is pretty basic. You have surreptitiously obtained or forced some information that puts you one move ahead of your audience. The routine below is one of only two routines that made its way into both shows.

The routine uses a character I like to trot out. That is my great aunt fortuneteller. Is she real? Well maybe, maybe not. What does it really matter? She is real enough as far as I am concerned.

I worked quite a bit on this. I didn't want the writing of information to be close in time to when the information was given. I played around a lot with the wording and the timing and one of the first times I performed it, I actually screwed up the timing. You **MUST** rehearse this and be very aware of your timing. I think it is pretty critical to helping hide the technique.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The performer tells a story about his great aunt and games she used to play to develop psychic intuition.

The performer writes down something. He then explains that he is going to send a location out to the audience and wants them to try to mentally pick it up. An audience member then names where he was thinking.

Next he asks the audience to think of their favorite Christmas present from when they were a kid. They do so and the performer picks up on something. He seems to be having some trouble, but then he writes down something. The audience member then names the gift.

Finally, the performer explains how there was another little game, something that neither of them could know. He writes a prediction down.

Now, an audience member comes up and looks at some personal trinkets. The parties play a little game of elimination, leaving just one item.

The performer then hands the three pieces of paper out to each of the audience members. The location matches. The Christmas gift is close but not a perfect match. The final prediction is shown to match what was written. Then the performer shows that the ring, which was the chosen item was his great aunt's favorite thing. So much so that she even sent out Christmas cards with it on the card. The performer shows a blown up version of the card confirming the prediction.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: The word "ring" is written on a notebook before the beginning of the routine. The performer pantomimes writing the location, when in reality, he isn't writing anything. The paper with the word "ring" on it is torn out and placed on a table. This is the one ahead item as the ring will be forced.

Next, the performer asks the spectator for the name of the location they were thinking of. Then, launch into the Christmas explanation. When trying to get the gift, you write down the location, tear that out and place it on the table.

Then after speaking about the game with trinkets, you write down the outcome of the game. In reality you are writing down the gift.

Finally, the PATEO force is used to select the ring. If you aren't familiar with it, it is explained in detail below.

DETAILED EXPLANATION: When I was a kid, we had one TV in the house. For those of you closer to my age or older, you probably had the same situation. When the news came on, that was what we watched. It was boring to me as a kid, so I started trying to predict what the anchor was going to say. It got where I could often speak along with the newsmen. It drove my mom crazy. I'm sure you have all done the same thing when you try to repeat what someone says and even say things along with them? You know, when you were kids? I still do that to my daughter. It drives her crazy.

As a kid, I wondered if I had some type of ability. I thought about this a bit more as I got older and met my great aunt. She was something of a black sheep. She moved to Arkansas after retiring from her avocation as a fortune teller in Boston. I used to spend some summers with her and we would play little games. I think this was her way of trying to find my abilities, just as I have been doing with you. I want to share some of these games with you.

I am going to write something.

At this point, I pretend to write something down. In reality, I have already written "ring" in my notebook before the show. This is my one ahead. I tear the paper out of the notebook and fold it several times. Not only does this hide the writing, but it also gives me an excuse to open them up and look at what is written before I pass them out. I know some performers find it to be a weakness that you can't clearly set the papers in a row and everything is clean, but if you just set the predictions down on top of each other in a haphazard way and then look at them before handing them out, it is a natural act.

PERFORMANCE TIP

Every interaction I have with a spectator starts with me asking their name. Spectators are people. They are people who paid to see you. Ask their name and use it if you can.

I have written down a location on this pad. I am going to tear out the paper and place it here. Since it is out of my hands, there is nothing more I can do.

I want to project a city to everyone. This may come across as a name, words in your head. Maybe it will be a visual, like a postcard. However it happens, just let the location come to you naturally; any place in the world.

I will help a little bit and tell you that it is not Little Rock. It is also not something really obscure like Mittenweald, Germany. Now, please close your eyes and clear your mind of anything you may see. I am going to project that image now. You will see it in your mind

I then take a few moments. Then I ask a spectator if a place come to mind. At times, I will have people say no; at first that bothered me. I thought, “why aren’t people participating?” Then it struck me that they very well could be participating and thought a location should have come across clearly. Since I am doing mentalism, it may not work all the time. It is fine if it doesn’t. If the audience member says no location came across I now just say, “that is fine, not everyone picks up on what I try to send” and I move on to another spectator.

What location came to mind?

Very good.

TALES FROM THE ROAD

During one of the shows, a man spoke out when I mentioned Mittenweald, Germany. He said he lived there for several years and that is where he was thinking of. He asked how I knew that.

Another such moment occurred when someone said the place they were thinking of was Myrtle Beach. My next stop was a convention at Myrtle Beach where I was performing. I was able to tell everyone that and they could check my website for proof.

A third example was a show that my daughter was attending. Earlier that day we had a discussion about Disney World. When I asked an audience member about his location, he said Disney World. At the point where we revealed the location, I explained that I had spoken to my daughter earlier in the day about a location. I called her up on stage and asked her where we were talking about going and she revealed it was Disney World.

Synchronous events like this are phenomenal. Be on the lookout for them and when they happen, take advantage of them!

Note that you do not write anything down right now.

I am not going to suggest anything to you as I just did. I want to see how I do with another experiment I used to do with my great aunt. She would then have me think of something and she would try to get it.

Everyone, close your eyes please. I want you to think back to Christmas time when you were a kid. There is so much going on, so much excitement.

You can hear the fire crackling in the fireplace, the smell of smoke and wood. You can smell the Christmas tree. Maybe it smells like pine or maybe it wasn't a real tree and smells like moth balls from being in storage.

You remember how it felt, right? It is Christmas day. You wake up and you can't wait to run to the Christmas tree and see what Santa left you. The boxes are all there. But there is one gift, one gift that you remember more than any other gift. It was your favorite toy. I want you to visualize this, think about it, how it looked, how it felt, how it smelled... Just think of that favorite toy. Get it in your mind and really see it. Now everyone try to project it to me.

I think that childhood is a really magical time and if you celebrated Christmas, I am sure you can remember how magical that time was. I want to be able to take people back in time to a place that was special. A place that was magical.

I try to engage as many of the senses as possible. It is difficult to engage smell or taste, but by using words and memories, I want to try to take people to that time.

At this point, when I ask them to project the gift, I act as if I am having a hard time picking up on a gift. I hesitantly write as if I can't figure it out. At this point, I am writing the location.

There are two reasons that I hesitate here. First, the location is often a longer word. By hemming and hawing, by looking uncertain, it gives me more time to write.

Secondly, it goes to the "too perfect" theory. You are taking someone's very personal memories. You are getting information that should be impossible to learn. By missing just a bit, I think it actually strengthens the effect. So, what I do is come close, but not perfect. For instance one spectator said "Master's of the Universe." That would have been really long to write for one thing, but also, I don't want to be dead on, so I wrote Skeletor. If

that is an obtuse reference, he was a toy and character in the Masters of the Universe.

Just as an aside, from performing this enough, you can almost use this as your force. I am amazed at how often the response is a game system of some kind. I am just a little bit too old for that to have been my favorite gift. However, pick someone who is in their late 20's to early 30's (as of the writing of this book) and see if it isn't a game system.

For many older folks it is often a bike or a BB gun.

Now we would play one more little game. This is a game where neither of us would know the outcome. My aunt would have different random items selected and we would try to figure out what would be left. Often before the items were even chosen.

I have a box here, and in the box are items that belonged to various family members. One of them however, was my aunt's favorite item.

I am going to write one more thing here.

At this point, I write down the Christmas gift. We are now going to move on to the PATEO force. Read the script carefully as it more or less explains how it works.

This one is now out of reach and my prediction is final.

Now, have you ever tried to experiment with psychic ability?

I am going to start by letting you touch two items, any two you would like. Now, I am going to eliminate one of them.

We start with five items. The spectator touches two items. If one of the items is the force item, the ring in this example, then you simply eliminate the other item.

Now it is my turn, I am going to touch two items and you decide which one you want to eliminate.

This should be obvious, but just make sure you don't touch the force item. It doesn't matter which one they eliminate.

Your turn again, touch two items.

Now you eliminate one more. This leaves us with two items. I change the straightforward PATEO force here.

We are now left with two items. We could continue with the game, but I don't want to do that. I want you to have a free choice. Please take one of the remaining items.

Regardless of which one the spectator chooses I ask them:

Are you sure of your choice. You can change your mind if you want and take the other one.

It really is irrelevant because I will control the outcome, but the more chances you give your spectator the better. You can also point out later that they even had the ability to change their mind but chose not to do so.

If they are holding the ring: *Excellent. You had the choice to change your mind, but you chose the ring, please step forward with it.*

If they are holding the other item: *Very well. You had the choice to change your mind, but you eliminated the key (or whatever the item is) leaving the ring on the table.*

Ok. Well, let's see how I did. Prediction number 1, here you go, number 2, here you go and three, here you go. Don't open the papers yet. With each of these experiments, I did something a little different. The first was something only I knew at the beginning. The second was something only you knew and the third was something neither of us knew.

Often I call each of the three spectators to the stage. I want people to be able to clearly see what was written and see their faces.

Can each of you please confirm that we did not meet before the show? Did we plan anything or did I ask you to do anything? Have we ever spoken before?

Assistant one, I wrote down the name of a place and tried my best to suggest the name of that place to you. This was something that only I knew at the beginning. I did my best to project the location written on that piece of paper. You said...and I predicted? Please open the paper. How many other people also selected this city? Anyone?

I ask that final question because if anyone else thought of that place then it helps solidify the idea that maybe others also picked up on what I was sending out. If not, I just comment that it's good that we had a good receiver out there.

Assistant two, I thought that I may have picked up on a childhood toy that may have been your favorite. I had a bit of trouble with this one, but I did get close. Please open your paper and show it to everyone. You said it was... and I wrote something. Please open the paper.

Here, I again comment that I thought I had it. I was really close, but not quite. People still usually react in a very positive way when they see how close it was.

Finally I wrote down my aunt's favorite item. There is this idea that an item can hold the energy of its owner. This is the only item that was owned by my aunt and I thought you might be drawn to it in some way. Please show everyone what I wrote down.

The ring belonged to my great aunt. It was her prized possession. So much so, that she even sent out Christmas cards

one year with a picture of that ring. I know you could think I just made that up, but I have that card...well a photo of it to show everyone.

Here, I turn around a large card that has been on stage. It is a blown up version of the picture below. I had it mounted on foam core.

Another note that I would like to make is that the items we work with are all actual old items. They are things I picked up here and there at flea markets. I have a walking liberty silver dollar, an old key, a ring, a postcard and a small leather notebook.

As each item is eliminated, I state what that item is along with a little story. The key is from the hotel that my grandmother and grandfather owned in a small town in Arkansas. It was the master key she used to let herself into all of the rooms to clean them. The walking silver liberty dollar belonged to my uncle Avery. It is what was used in the Hand in Animal Trap routine. The leather notebook is one of my favorite items. I say it belonged to my grandfather and in it he wrote a proposal for marriage to my grandmother. There is also a funny poem, which I let the audience member on stage read out loud. They were already in there when I bought the little notebook. The postcard I found in a bunch of my grandmother's junk. I don't know where it is from, but it must have meant something for her to keep it.

I think this adds a level of believability to the show as a whole. These aren't random, pointless items. They mean something. They are important. The more parts of the show that are genuine, that are real, the more you can sell the idea that what you are doing is real.

I have had very good responses with this routine and it is towards the end of my show. I want to pack the most punches towards the end, leading to the finale.

Game of Death

This is one that admittedly, many people won't like. I have heard so many performers state that they aren't fans of smash and stab. I simply disagree with them. I am not a fan of smash and stab just for the sake of doing it. I am not a fan of trivializing it and I am not a fan of putting the spectator at risk in any manner. However, my audience members often remember this routine both for the scripting and the inherent danger.

Secondly, this is a routine that involves the stories of Nazis and Jews. For some this may just be too much. I understand that some areas or audiences may not be appropriate. I treat this with seriousness and am not at all flippant or lighthearted. I have received very good responses from this presentation. The show that I perform involves sideshow, danger and some things that are edgy, so I have no problem doing this.

I built my own smash and stab. It isn't foolproof because none of them truly are, but I am very careful and mine has multiple redundancies to allow me to identify the nail. Without going into details, the nail is in a fixed location on a rotating wooden platform. It cannot be removed, so I know that that can't be monkeyed with. Right on the end of the board, next to the nail, there is a knot in the wood. The rest of the pieces are knot free. The pieces are all painted black, so it isn't immediately obvious, but it is very visible. Also, there are two bolts in the assembly. One of the bolts has the lettering ground off. The other one has the letters pointing towards the nail. So, I now have multiple things to look for and I do so repeatedly throughout the routine.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The performer tells a story about a man who was an advisor to Hitler. He demonstrates a game that was played. A nail is affixed to a rotating board. An audience member moves the nail to whatever position he likes and hides the nail under a cup. The performer then smashes each of the cups, leaving the cup with the nail, and his hand, undamaged.

BASIC EXPLANATION: The location of the nail is marked so the performer knows where it is located. There are many different commercial options for these. I won't recommend one over another because I have never used any of them. I have always used my own technique.

DETAILED EXPLANATION: This is another one where there isn't much in the way of an explanation. The scripting is what is key here. There is a lot of fact and a little bit of fiction here, like most good stories.

I want to tell you about the intersection of fate and freewill but rather than giving some abstract theory, I will tell you a story. There was a famous man named Eric Jan Hanussen. How many people have heard of him? That is how famous he was. No one has heard of him.

In the 1930's in Germany, most people knew who he was. Even Hitler knew who he was. Right before the elections, Hanussen visited Hitler and gave him advice on how to present himself and techniques for crowd control. You see, Hanussen was an accomplished stage performer.

Hanussen also claimed to be psychic and that really captured the interest of Hitler. Joseph Goebbels was second in command and close confidant of Hitler. He himself was a master psychological manipulator, but he readily took credit for his skill and didn't claim it was from an occult source.

Goebbels did not like Hanussen and he feared that he was competing for the attention of the Fuhrer. Goebbels devised a test, hoping to prove that Hanussen was a fraud. Goebbels put together a wooden frame with a nail set in one of the holes. The test was simple. I will demonstrate.

As you see, the nail is in a piece of wood, which can be rotated. This can then be moved into any position as well. So essentially, the nail can be at any one of four positions. If the nail

is moved and then all four spots are covered with a paper bag, Hanussen wouldn't know where the nail was located. If Hanussen was so sure of his psychic ability, he should know the location of the nail and be able to slam his hand down on each of the bags avoiding the one with the nail.

At this point, Hanussen couldn't turn down the challenge, so he added some of his own terms. He said that someone who moved the nail had to be absolutely positive where the nail was located. So long as he could touch them, he claimed he could create a psychic link and discern the location.

I need someone from the audience to assist me.

Your name is? Where are you from?

I am going to play the part of Hanussen. I need you to play the part of the spectator.

I need you to spin the nail into any position and when you are done, please cover them with the cups. You can then continue to spin the nail if you want, BUT, you MUST remember the position of the nail.

My hands are what I use to perform. Without the use of my hands, my ability to earn would be vastly reduced, so it is critical that you remember where the nail is located. Do you understand? This is very dangerous.

I am going to face the audience and they can watch me. I am going to turn around now. Nice and loud, tell me when you are done.

At this point, I walk down off stage, into the audience. I do this because once someone suggested I was listening for where the cup is located. I don't even know how you would do that, but this eliminates that option. I close my eyes so the audience can see I am not peeking in any manner.

When they say they are done, I return to my spot on stage. I convey complete seriousness throughout this presentation. Nothing is treated lightly.

Ok, please don't say anything and don't do anything. Just stay as relaxed as possible.

I take the arm of the spectator at the elbow and go through smashing the cups. This is the time where there is great buildup. Move slowly! Don't rush, as this is the point of tension. I go through the routine and take my applause. It appears that the routine is over, and then I recite the following lines.



Hanussen claimed to be psychic and so Hitler believed. Was this really an act of psychic power or something different? Your entire body is filled with bundles of nerves and these nerves can fire involuntarily and cause your muscles to move. Everyone has experienced this with muscle twitches.

Speaking of muscle twitches, man I am still a little shaky. That one always scares me.

There are also smaller movements of the muscle, not just twitches. These smaller movements are virtually impossible to detect unless one has practice in reading these small muscle twitches. The ability to do this called muscle reading or Hellstromism. Hanussen was known to practice muscle reading on stage. Maybe that is how Hanussen did his feat? Maybe not.

So was Hanussen really psychic? If he truly psychic, he should have known that the Nazis would learn that his true name was Hermann Steinschneider, a very Jewish name. He would also know what his body would be buried in a field after being executed one week later. No one knows who killed him, but many speculated it was Goebbels.

You see Hanussen made the freewill decision to befriend Adolph Hitler. Hanussen also made the decision to play a very dangerous game. Just as I was, Hanussen was also successful in playing this game. However, his fate, as all who gambled with the Nazis, was death.

My Story

I won't go into the detailed workings of *My Story* because the working is not mine. I will say that it is a confabulation routine. It involves a story that nicely wraps up the show and the theme of fate versus freewill. While I am not providing all of the details of the working, I will provide my script, most of which is true. I am also providing a link to the performance so you can at least see how it is performed.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: Throughout the show, I ask one person for a month, another for a day and a final person for a time. Then at the end I reveal that this information was written on the bottom of a tray that was in front of the audience the entire time.

SCRIPT: *I have spoken about fate and freewill and maybe you know how you feel about it. I will now reveal what I believe. I believe that one influences the other and no one controls. To that extent, I also believe that you can create your own fate through your choices. You are empowered to do with your life what you want. By standing on this stage, I am doing it right now in my life.*

Before I go, I want to share one final story with everyone. People have often asked me how I became involved in this type of performance. They ask me how I do the things I do. The more relevant question might be why I do the things I do. I do these things because I am compelled to. It is my fate you might say.

I had a car that I could have sworn was cursed. It was sold with a salvage title. It had been in a wreck but it was rebuilt, in good shape, and the price was right. Shortly after buying it, my wife backed into the door of the car. Then I hit a fox going 70 on the interstate. Yes, a fox. Next, lightning struck a tree my car was parked under and the tree fell on my car. I had to use a chainsaw and cut it out. I think you can see why I thought the car was cursed.

One night, I was driving this car home. It was late and I was tired. I am sure everyone has had that sensation that they just zone out as the highway rolls by. Sometimes you don't even remember changing lanes or anything about the trip. It's like you are hypnotized. Anyway, as I was driving, I saw something in the headlights on the side of the road. I was sure I saw a child on the side of the highway. I slowed down and pulled onto the shoulder. Imagine seeing a child on the side of the highway late at night. It was very surreal. I put my car in reverse. I turned my head to look again and in the red light of the taillights, I was sure, I saw the child down in the ditch. Standing there.

I sat on the side of the road for a minute thinking I must just be tired or my eyes were deceiving me. Why would a child be on the side of the road? I suddenly felt like I needed to get out of the car immediately. I got out and ran around the front of the car.

BOOM! A semi-truck slammed into my car, pushing it down the road and thankfully away from me. The driver had fallen asleep at the wheel. Had I been in my car a few seconds later I likely would have been killed.

Obviously, I was shocked and disoriented. I stood there for a moment, not knowing what to do. Then I thought about the child. I ran down in to the ditch and looked back and forth. There was no child anywhere to be seen. I ran to the semi-truck. The driver was dazed by otherwise Ok. I asked him about the child. He had fallen asleep and seen nothing.

I don't know what exactly compelled me to get out of that car. Was it a dream? Was I seeing things? Maybe intuition or an angel? A part of me, telling me to move? I don't know. What I do know is the exact date and time it happened. You see, I had just bought a decorative tray for my wife for her birthday. It was in the car and about the only thing salvageable, so I kept it. It has been up here with me on stage in full view the entire night.

Three different people chose random months, dates and times. These choices were free choices. They were not prompted, prepared or planned. However, something more akin to fate dictated the results. Fate that interceded for me.

That tray was a memento to me. Something to remind me of how close I came to dying. Something to remind me of that day. A day I will never forget.

(Performer turns over tray to reveal the same month, date and time name.)

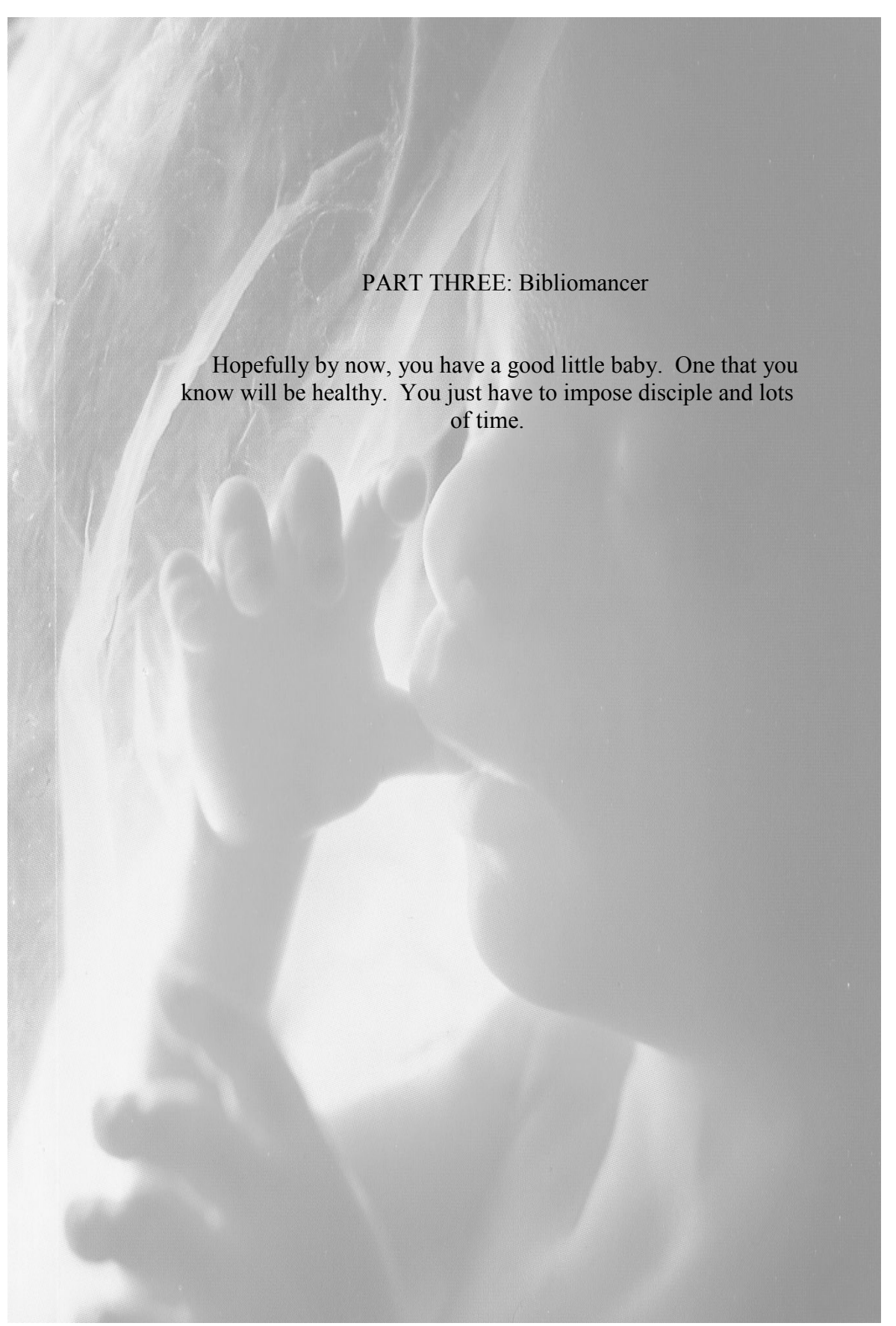
If you are interested in the working of this, I can recommend “Connected” by Paul Stockman. I saw him perform at Mindvention and he did a routine with this basic working. I couldn’t work it out until I was falling asleep and then a method hit me. I later bought Connected and it was indeed the same method. This originally was a Ted Leslie idea, which can be found in *Stunners*, under the name “Berlin Bears.” I find it to be very strong.

The response you get from the audience is incredible. You start hearing the “no ways” before you even turn the tray around as they start to anticipate the impossible. I have often received standing ovations with this ending.

Go to the below link to watch the routine or use the QR code to take you there.

<https://youtu.be/myv5Exfd20E>





PART THREE: Bibliomancer

Hopefully by now, you have a good little baby. One that you know will be healthy. You just have to impose discipline and lots of time.

Paul Prater
Bibliomancer



Paul Prater
Bibliomancer
 At the Shadowbox Theater

\$8 with \$3 Fringe button available
 at the door or at www.nofringe.org

new orleans
FRINGE FESTIVAL
 fearless performers
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Paul Prater will read your body language, your thought processes & your mind in this incredible show. A fascination with books & reading forms the framework for this show by incorporating tales from his childhood & those from yours.

This isn't a "sit back and watch" show. Audience members will help create the show. Paul will ask you to lie to him. You may be asked to take part in a past life regression or have memories implanted in your mind. Finally, an incredible piece of seeming coincidence will occur when much of what happened in the show was foretold years earlier in way that can't just be coincidence.

This show will leave you wondering if you just took part in a fabricated work of fiction or if what you saw was real.

Get tickets at the door
 or at paulprater.com

www.paulprater.com

Paul Prater's
Bibliomancer
 Mindreading, Time Travel & Coincidence



Info/Tickets: www.paulprater.com

Bibliomancer

After about two and a half years of doing *The Odditorium*, I decided it was time to write a different show. I had several motivations.

1. I didn't want to carry an anvil and bed of nails everywhere I performed. They are heavy and you cannot travel with them, especially if you are flying. As I started to perform in other locations more, this became impractical. I wanted a small and easy to pack show, which can be accomplished with mentalism.

2. I wanted something more palatable to a corporate or business client. They often requested that I not do any sideshow. Also, you don't want to wear nice clothes when lying on a bed of nails. I wanted to wear nicer outfits for performing and to present a more professional image.

3. I wanted something with an increased level of sophistication when it came to the technique behind the routines. I don't mean that I wanted something that was technically difficult. What I wanted were multiple layers of obfuscation and delays in the routines. I really started thinking about how an audience member could reverse engineer a routine and I wanted to further obscure backtracking. This was really just for my own sake, as I didn't get called out or anything.

4. I wanted even tighter adherence to the theme. Sometimes, in *The Odditorium*, some routines still felt like they were forced in, rather than being a smooth fit. I wanted *Bibliomancer* to be about books and reading. Reading, to me, is an escape. It is being transported elsewhere. This was my theme.

I started working on the outline and script. I knew where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do. One of my book test routines, which is described in *The Odditorium* section, got really strong responses and I wanted to keep that. I also wanted to keep

a confabulation ending but I wanted a different method. I had to have a different method to fit the story that I wrote.

So, with those two ideas in mind, I set about writing a new show. The previous year I had applied to the New Orleans Fringe Festival. If you aren't familiar with Fringe Festivals, you should look them up. They are great outlets for performance and for catching some interesting theater.

That year, I was on the reserve list, which meant if someone dropped out, I could get in. The deadline for the new year was quickly approaching and my girlfriend encouraged me to submit my application again. I didn't think it was worth it. Additionally, the show wasn't completely written. The basic script was written, but I had no idea how I would accomplish some of the stuff I had written. The "sneaky stuff" wasn't done yet.

Despite that, my girlfriend was persistent and insistent.

I begrudgingly sent in my application, which includes the overview of the show and other criteria on which they can judge you, as well as my script, which I didn't yet know how to perform. Well, imagine my surprise when I was accepted into the festival. I am thankful for my girlfriend's persistence because it was a great experience. It also forced me to act.

It was time to get serious about technique. I read and read and read, and found some partial solutions, but many that didn't fit my criteria of what I wanted. As for that ending, I found ideas that got me halfway there, but nothing that was a solution. As I was falling asleep one night, the final piece fell into place. That is often when I come up with solutions, as I am falling asleep. I completed the show and the techniques well in advance of the Fringe Festival, as I needed plenty of time to work on the presentations in front of live audiences. I wasn't going to let Fringe be the first time things were rehearsed.

Thankfully I had a month straight of weekend performances. Every weekend I had back to back shows to work on the routines.

I was working a zombie paintball haunt for Halloween. The shows were short and ran continuously, so the material was well rehearsed by the time of the Fringe Festival. Often I performed the same routines seven to ten times a night.

The show has received very positive comments and it is my current show that I am performing, aside from still doing *The Odditorium* when requested and I am also working on a show with my girlfriend. I have never performed with another person, aside from straight theater, so this will be new experience.

This show is entirely mentalism. I will break down the entire show routine by routine.

As far as a stage set, I wanted the look of minimalism. I wanted it to be propless mentalism. It isn't but I wanted the appearance of such. The focus is on me solely. I still do use my big table. It has shelves in the back that hides everything until I am ready to use it. I also have a folding waiter's stand that holds an old suitcase. This holds all of my props. I take them out, and then use the closed suitcase as my table up front. I also have an easel and a large pad that I use for part of the routine. That is it.



Bibliomancer Set List

Opening

Dead Age

The Envelope

Your Favorite Story

Nighttime Flight of Fancy

Tennyson Book Test

Looking at Death

Second Attempt

Hunting Women in the Dark

One Ahead

Drawing

My Story

The Opening

I will briefly discuss the opening of the show. There is a lot of opinion out there about that. Much of it says you need to do something quick and interesting. I don't necessarily agree with that, but I do think you need to do something entertaining. The point is to endear yourself to the audience.

For *Bibliomancer*, the title is a term that isn't readily known. So, I take the opportunity to define it, while introducing myself and setting up the theme of the show. This is prerecorded with music behind it. I create a playlist of my show on my iPhone and store all of the show tracks there, including this opening. The script is as follows.

Bibliomancy is divination by books, poems, odes or by verses of the Bible. Bibliomancy has been around as long as the written word has existed. The Sibylline oracles were some of the earlier examples of bibliomancy. The Romans used Homer and others to predict the future and answer questions. The Medieval bibliomancer also used Homer, but the church, if it was tolerate such shit, preferred the Bible. Now, virtually any book can be used.

Now, let's welcome someone who can use much more than just books, our own bibliomancer, Paul Prater.

At the end of those lines, I walk out on stage and start the show. Originally, I came out as the words were spoken, standing on a dark stage with one dim spot and my head down. At the end, I would raise my head and speak.

At the suggestion of a friend, who attended one of the shows, I changed that and stay off stage until the conclusion of the opening. I do think it makes for a stronger beginning.

Dead Age

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The entire audience is asked to think of the age of someone who has passed. One audience member is asked in particular to concentrate on the age.

The performer starts writing seemingly random numbers on a large pad on an easel. None of the numbers are the age the spectator is thinking about.

The performer is dejected until he notices something. All of the horizontal, vertical and diagonal numbers add up to that age. The four corners add up to it, as well as the center four numbers.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: A spectator writes the number on a card. It goes into a peek wallet. The performer peeks at it and then completes a magic square. The magic square chart is printed out in small size and taped to my marker so there is no memorization.

DETAILED EXPLANATION: There are two bits of trickery here. The first is obtaining the number that was written. I have two different methods I use depending on whether I have people to help, such as my door people or not. I either use an impression device or a peek wallet. The impression device is easier, but in my mind, has its own drawbacks.

Personally, I like to limit any kind of interaction with the audience before the show. That is why I only use the impression device when I have assistants. The impression gimmick does make for an easier and cleaner presentation; however, it could also suggest that perhaps you had time to learn what was written. I wanted to do away with that suggestion.

If I use an impression gimmick, then I also have several un-gimmicked pads. I will have my person helping out get the impression and bring the pad back. Several other pads will be

passed around as people are coming in. They have them in their possession and all looks above board. Also, by having more than one person write down an age, it helps diffuse that idea that I learned someone's number beforehand. I don't do this with everyone, just five or so people.

If I use the impression gimmick, I don't need to use a windowed envelope or write anything on stage. That does make for an easier presentation, but I don't always have people to help and wanted to have a solution for when it is only me at the show, thus the peek wallet version.

The peek wallet I use is a wonderful card wallet by Paul Carnazzo. It is called the Lookout Wallet and is made to hold business cards. I love it and use it legitimately to hold and pass out my business cards. You can get it from his website, which is mentalvoyage.com.

Right after I take a peek at the number, I pick up a clipboard to do the quick bit of math to complete the magic square. I can do this in my head, but I feel better in writing it down. I am also writing that number into a letter that is part of my finale. All will be explained in detail in the explanation of the finale. As I am writing, I am shaking my head as if I cannot quite get the number. I then move to the easel and start the square.

If you are not familiar with the magic square, it is a square of numbers in which all horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines add up to the same number. Additionally, the four numbers in each corner and in the middle, also add up to the same number. It is a seemingly impossible feat.

In reality, it is very simple. The magic square that I use is straight from Karl Fulves, *Self-Working Number Magic*. It is a four by four square, so sixteen total numbers. The one downside that some performers point out is that there is one larger number and then all smaller numbers in each row. I don't think that makes the working transparent. The positive of this is that it

makes the addition easier, so the audience can follow along. I see it as a positive overall, instead of a negative.

I did not want to rely on my memory to draw up the magic square and place the correct numbers. Previously, I would lightly pencil in the numbers on a piece of paper. However, I wanted a better method. I printed a smallish square and taped it onto the marker I use to complete the square. It is right in front of me the entire time and there is nothing to forget.

Most of the square is already filled out. There are only four numbers that have to be added at the time of performance. To get to those, it is easy. For the square I use, you take the original number, for instance 72. You would subtract 21. I break it down even easier. First subtract one. Now subtract twenty, so we now have 51. That is your first number. It goes in the “A” slot. From there you just add one for each progressive number. In other words, 52 goes in B, 53 goes in C and 54 goes in D. It is pretty straightforward and easy on the fly math, even for the numerically challenged. The rest of the square is printed out and taped directly to the marker that I use. No memorization is required.

I also wanted to write the numbers where the audience could watch the progression. I decided to use a large pad from the art store and a folding easel. The folding easel comes from Office Depot. They are about fifteen dollars and will break down very small for travel.

BREAKDOWN OF SCRIPT: The next few lines, the first lines of the show spoken by me, were critical. I thought carefully about how I wanted to structure the beginning. The recorded introduction is with a British accent, so to a Southerner it sounds very proper. If you have heard me speak, you know that I have an unmistakable Southern accent. For those reading who may not be familiar with the American South, it is often perceived as less than elegant.

I also thought about the first forms of communication. What were they? They were hand signs, pictographs and numbers.

Numbers are something that I can work with. I had been playing with a magic square; one that I had put in shows here and there and wanted to make a permanent part of the show. This was the perfect place.

I still wanted to play with that formality of the theater, however. So, I started with the following lines:

Before the written word was the number. Numbers are pure, they are universal. Everyone understands numbers.

The above lines are said with me standing very rigid. I am displaying formality, stiffness. I also say them as cleanly as I can without betraying my accent. Then, I relax and say the next line in my own voice.

Except those who suck at math. This is an artistic crowd overall, so that probably is a large number of you.

This allows the audience to now relax. This breaks that formality that often is present in theaters and of course, gets a laugh. Because it is true.

I then move forward with my magic square presentation. I feel that it is important for me to explain my thinking when it comes to routines, particularly mentalism. Let me start by saying, I love mentalism. It is what I perform. I am often bored to tears by mentalism. I have seen performances by most of the top mentalists in the world. Some of have been terrific and inspiring. Some have been yawn inducing and boring. A lot of it, to me, comes down to one question.

“Why are you doing that?”

Are you doing whatever it is because you are awesome? Are you doing it to show off? Why?

So for the magic square, in particular, I wanted to have a reason to use it. It is one of those routines where it can definitely turn

into a “look how clever I am” type of routine. I wanted to avoid that all together. So, I will provide my scripting and my working to demonstrate how I accomplished this.

You don't even need words to convey numbers. Your two eyes can see the three saber tooth tigers.

Speaking of numbers and saber tooth tigers and death, I want you to think of someone who has passed. We are starting on a bit of a macabre note.

I don't want it to be a child, as that can be painful. I want it to be someone you have fond memories of, someone who was an adult, so someone over 21. To make it easier on me, please make it someone under 100, so from 21-99.

I want to point out in the lines above that I specifically say, “to make it easier on me, keep it under 100.” I love adding lines like this. It really does keep it easier on me to do the dirty work. These lines are really just for me.

As they are thinking about that, I also like to add the following line.

As a mindreader, I can tell you that everyone in this room will die between the ages of 21 and 100. If I am wrong, simply let me know and I will refund your ticket price.

Bob Cassidy writes about major effects and minor effects, with major effects being those that the whole audience can take part in. I considered that advice when preparing this show. This doesn't quite fit his criteria, but I do involve the whole audience in a manner of speaking by asking everyone to participate. I do this for two reasons.

First, it gets everyone involved. Secondly, being the first routine, I have learned that sometimes your audience doesn't know that they are expected to participate. This primes them with the expectation that they may be called upon to assist. At times, I

have asked a spectator if they have an age in mind and I have received a negative response. Well, no problem, just move on to the next person. Now, however, everyone knows that they may be called upon.

Everyone get that person in mind, really think of them; think of how old they were when they passed. You don't even have to be exact, just roughly. So for instance, if you know that they were in their seventies, but not an exact date, just think of 71 or 72. The important thing is that you lock a number in your head.

I now have two different approaches depending on how I obtained the information. If I did it with an impression device, I want to use my wording to make it seem as though the person was just now thinking of it. I will point that person out in the audience.

As I asked everyone to think about someone who had passed and their age, did you do so as well?

Their response is really irrelevant.

You do have an age in mind don't you? It was someone you were thinking of earlier this evening, wasn't it?

Now for the people who wrote down an age earlier, this makes perfect sense. It dispels the idea that I am trying to pull one over on the audience. I am acknowledging that I asked the person to think of a number earlier.

For those who have no idea that some people were asked to think of this earlier, this seems like another bit of impossible mindreading.

If I didn't use an impression device, I now choose my spectator.

Do you have someone in mind? Very good, please just write down the number. Before you do though, I want you to imagine. Go back in time to when you were in elementary school and think

about how the numbers would be over the blackboard on those cards, teaching you how to write them.

I want you to write the number like that. Write it very clearly, so that you can lock the image of the number in your head. It also makes it easier for me to pick up on the number. When you are done, please turn it face down and let me know.

You can see my use of words, just for me again. I say it makes it easier to pick up on the number. Well, it does! I am going to use a peek wallet to glimpse the number and if it isn't clearly written, then I can't see it. That is the entire purpose of having them imagine those numbers over the board. It is so they print them clearly. Often, the audience catches on to this and I will get some laughs and snickers when I am asking them to imagine the numbers over the board. I don't believe that they are on to the method in any way and even if they are, they have probably forgotten about the wallet or the writing by the end, as it is long out of play. I think they are just following along that I need to be able to read the writing though I don't explicitly state it.

I will slip this into my wallet. Now just keep the image of that number in your mind. Writing something helps you to concentrate on it.

The card goes into the wallet.

I like to separate things in time. In the past, I would turn my back to peek as I was walking back to the stage. I don't like that though. It is too close in time to when the person wrote something and also the time when I am most likely being watched. So, I return to the stage, keeping the wallet held in one hand in full view.

Now, you came here to see feats of mindreading. You might be skeptical, and that is OK if you are. I am too.

Things don't always come through in precise or easy to decipher ways. Oddly, numbers, in particular, are some of the

hardest things to make sense of, which is counterintuitive if they are the purest form of communication. But, let's be honest here, mindreading is counterintuitive too.

Here is where I open the wallet and prepare for the peek. I am just holding it in my hands, open and ready to view in a moment.

If numbers came through clearly, I would just go to Vegas, bet on the winner in roulette and keno every time and retire in about six months.

If numbers are the most difficult, why would I start with those? Well, if I fail now, you probably will have forgotten by the end of the show.

At this punchline is usually when I look down and get the peek. People are relaxed and laughing. Sometimes I do it at the line about retiring. It is when I feel it is right. I do it right in front of the crowd, looking at the number while they are all looking at me. I love the boldness of it.

At this point, I no longer refer to the numbers as numbers, but rather as an age. I want to make this personal. Numbers can be abstract and this is the age of their beloved departed. I don't want this to seem like a math or number trick.

Also, with the above scripting, I have conditioned the audience that I might fail. I am pre-conditioning them to believe that failure has occurred.

At this point, I set the wallet down on a sidetable. It doesn't matter. Let's get it out of play. As I set it down I pick up a clipboard and speak as though I am trying to pick up on an age. In reality I am quickly doing the math and writing down the number on a sheet of paper sealed into an envelope. This is covered in the Time Travel routine.

I want to try to see if I can pick up on the age. I am having a bit of a problem here. Wait, I want to do this where everyone can see it.

I now place the clipboard face down, removing the envelope that was paper clipped to it. I now walk over to the tripod that I use. I want this to seem like a spur of the moment deal, so I open the pad or change the page. I then write the first line of four numbers.

Is the age up there?

No.

Well, this is uncomfortable.

When I say that line I really try to sell it. Don't just say words. What would you do if you screwed up on stage? What would your body language say? How would those words come out? You really need to sell this. I want the audience to feel uncomfortable as well.

When someone pays to see your show, they want you to "win." They want to see you succeed. By seeing you fail, you gain empathy. I want empathy. Not pity, mind you, just empathy. So, I try to convey something less than defeat. I am not giving up yet, I just didn't get what I wanted either. Also, when the audience thinks you have failed, and you are successful in the end, it is much more powerful. There is a sense of relief. So, this is one of the most critical moments in the routine. Not the victory.

I do one line at a time. On the third, I say:

Well as a mindreader, I can tell the age isn't up there.

After the fourth line of numbers is completed, I look deflated. I look at the numbers; I look at the audience member.

Who was this you were thinking about? Were they a sort of trickster? Did they like to play games? More studious and smart?

The above lines are all suggestions. These are what I call my “maybe hits.” I incorporate these into my show. I will explain.

I always start with the line:

Were they a bit of a joker, did they like to play games?

If they say yes, then you have a hit. If they say no, I then go to:

Hmmm...did they like puzzles or sodoku?

If they respond with a yes, that is a hit. I follow up with:

Well that is a type of game. Look what I noticed...

I then go into the reveal. I start by just doing the first line horizontally. Then I move down. The first few lines I do slowly so people can do the math in their head. If they are slow like me, they will need time to add up the figures. That is one of the reasons I like a simple square. It is easier for people to add.

After the first line, I pause for an applause cue. Then I move to the vertical, moving a bit quicker. At the end of the vertical, I also pause for applause, but then speak over it.

Wait, wait, look at this...

Often at this point someone may have noticed the diagonal or corners or what have you. This is what I want. I want the audience to make the connection themselves. Either way, I then continue through revealing the rest of the numbers and finish the routine.

Performance Tip

Make sure the spectator can clearly see the pad. I once wrote the first line and a spectator confirmed the age wasn't up there. I then write the next line and he said it was. It made me think I misread on the peek. This was not a comfortable situation.

I continued on with the routine nonetheless, thinking, oh well. At least the numbers adding up to the wrong age consistently will still be impressive.

As I finished I asked him to say out loud what the age was he was thinking of. He stated 92. The number was nowhere on the board. I pointed that out and he laughed. He said I didn't write clearly enough and he thought my seven was a nine.

It was a bit stronger, because I pointed out the number was there, in a manner of speaking. It was just hidden.

So, the moral of the story is make sure your spectator can see and that you write clearly as well! Well, that and be able to bullshit.

You see this was about more than numbers. The number you concentrated on, is the background for the entire life story of your grand(mother/father/aunt/uncle). You shared them with us and for that, I thank you.

TALES FROM THE ROAD

After a show I was approached by a couple who were quite unusual looking. They told me that they were real psychics and told me that I was as well. I asked why they thought that. The man explained that only by speaking to the dead could I have determined the age. I told him that I use trickery. He was insistent that I was lying and that I really was psychic. It isn't my job to change worldviews, so I just shrugged and told him I guess I am.

To see the routine using the peek method, go here:

https://youtu.be/8_WVRCldpIY



To see the pre-show method, go here:

<https://youtu.be/Y0BGxtBCuOI>



The Envelope

I end the show with a confabulation routine. I need to get the envelope out into the audience as early as possible, but assuming I used the peek wallet method, I am adding the number into a letter, most of which is written prior to the beginning of the show. I will save the working of the routine until the end. Here, just suffice it to say that I am able to add information to a letter on a full sheet of notebook paper, which is sealed inside an envelope. I also do it in front of the entire audience.

By the end of the show everyone has forgotten that this wasn't handed out right at the beginning. I can't hand it out right at the beginning because I need to add the number in, which was provided by the audience member and used in the previous routine.

Oh, before, I forget, I want you to hold onto this envelope for me. It is important that it doesn't go out of your sight; that you don't leave it anywhere and that no one else can get to it. OK?

Your Favorite Story

In my first show, I had a routine where every person in the audience took part. I really liked having something where every single audience member is a part of the show. There are however, logistical problems with this. Primarily, how long it takes and not having the show drag. I had a solution for that particular routine. I had each spectator see me during intermission. However, it still was awkward having everyone take their seats, as it involved having the entire audience move to different sides of the room.

I wanted to keep that same idea and started thinking through ideas. Q&A came to mind, so I read everything I could find on Q&A. It wasn't quite what I wanted, but getting close. I thought about my theme and how it could be incorporated. Then a solution hit me. Everyone could write down their favorite books before the show, put them in an envelope and drop them in a bag at the front of the stage. There are multiple things I could do with that, running throughout the show.

This is a multiphase routine that sets up much of the rest of the show. It is structured as a mental "warm up." Consider the fact that I just "failed" with the magic square routine. I need to warmup more. So, this allows a bit of byplay while at the same time setting up much of the show.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The performer reaches into a bag on stage where audience members have noted their favorite books on slips of paper, placed them in envelopes and dropped them into a bag. He pulls out a stack of envelopes and tries to pick up on information written inside.

After failing, he reads a title and asks everyone to mentally send their titles to him. He picks up on one person and does a reading on them. They were the person who wrote the title he read aloud.

Next, he calls another spectator up. He asks this person to merely think of their title. They do so and he starts naming letters in the title. Finally, he names the title of the book.

He then provides the audience some insight into how you can tell things about people from seemingly irrelevant information.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: Marked envelopes and a one ahead provide all of the working for the routine. The marking for the envelopes was one of the roadblocks to this presentation. I can't always control my stage lighting. I don't know how many envelopes will be in the bag. What if it gets lost or I can't see the mark? I didn't want to be squinting to find the right envelope. I realized I wouldn't be able to relay on sight for the marking.

Secondly, I also planned on leaving the marked envelopes in the hands of the spectators and having them drop them in the bag as they enter the theater, so it can't be obvious or readily identifiable or they may see the markings while they are holding the envelopes. This also got rid of other potential ideas for tactile marking. These requirements provided some challenges.

The envelopes I was using were the manila craft envelopes that are coin size. These perfectly hold a business card. I went through so many different possible ways to identify the envelopes. Then, I reached an elegant and simple solution. I made two slightly longer envelopes out of a manila folder. They are also slightly different in color, but that isn't what I use to tell them apart. It is the length. It is essentially a long and short deck of envelopes with just two long envelopes. Another bonus to making my own envelopes is that there is no adhesive so they can't be sealed shut, meaning they are reusable.

I reach into the bag and remove all of the envelopes. While I am talking, I turn them all on their side. Now, it is easy to remove them from the batch of envelopes, like stripping long cards from a deck. One goes on top and one goes on bottom. This is all done in a manner of seconds and while I am reciting lines.

Now, I also need to know who wrote what, so I handle that with a bit of pre-show. I hand the envelopes out and ask the spectator to write their favorite book from childhood and put it in the envelope and drop it in the bag up front when they take their seats. I can simply note who gets which envelope.

The next question you may have is how do I know who got which envelope? I sealed the seams with super glue. One has a bit too much, oozing out, making a totally innocuous but easily identifiable mark. It is shiny and easily visible if you know what to look for. That marking technique was a bit of providence, as I hadn't figured out what I was going to do yet and I inadvertently put too much glue on the seam.

I always hand the marked one to a man and the other to a woman. I think of it as fat oozing out from an envelope. The man doesn't have to be fat, just they are generally bigger than women. It is silly and goofy and it helps me remember who had which.

The one ahead principle is easier to explain along with the text, so it will be covered there.

DETAILED EXPLANATION: *Stories, stories, stories. Can a title tell a story? Can a title tell a story that isn't written?*

Ernest Hemingway was challenged to write a story in six words or less. This is what he came up with. "Baby shoes, for sale, never worn." A compelling story that is shorter than many book titles.

Each of you was given a piece of paper, an envelope and a pencil as you came in. You were asked to write your favorite book from childhood or young adulthood on a piece of paper and then place that paper in an envelope. Then, you were asked to drop that envelope in the bag on the front of the stage. This same bag you can see here. Very simple.

I once did this with credit card numbers. It was the most profitable performance I have done yet. I am also on several fraud watch lists. Well, my former stage name is, at least.

So, back to the question. Can a title tell a story? How much can you know about a person from their favorite book or story?

Phase I

One Ahead Option 1

At this point, I walk to the bag and scoop out all of the envelopes. I then turn them on their side, stripping out the longer cards as explained earlier. One goes on top and one on bottom as I am talking.

I walk to stage center and start looking through envelopes. I throw some on the ground, while muttering to myself. There are two different ways to handle the one ahead. If you are doing repeat shows, or corporate shows or anything else where you don't want to have anything inappropriate in the show, here is the best option.

Remove envelopes from the bottom using the glide, retaining the bottom envelope. I will hold an envelope up to my head and pretend to try to read it through the envelope. You know the pose; that standard mindreader pose. When it isn't something I like, I just throw the envelope on the ground. This is all in fun.

As I am doing this I say things such as...

"Nope, total shit book..."

"Can't make out that handwriting."

"Twilight, really?"

In between some of this, actually pull the bottom envelope. Don't completely remove it from the stack, but just enough to

enable you to open it. Make sure you are aware of who wrote the title by looking for your marked envelope. Simply pull out the card and read it. Push it back in and make some other comment. Continue pulling from the bottom using the glide. I assure you that no one will even notice that you didn't throw that one down, especially as you continue to pull from the bottom using the glide.

Now you have one title and no one knows it. I will cover the second method and then we can continue on after the explanation. Regardless of which method you use for the one ahead, we will continue down the same path. This is just a technique to obtain information.

PERFORMERS TIP

For the two folks who get the marked envelopes, I would highly recommend you look for someone close to your age. It seems that children's books are constantly changing and younger folks likely didn't read the same books you did.

While this isn't particularly troublesome, it does make it harder to remember the title or give a cold reading if you have no idea what the book is or what it is about.

One Ahead Option 2

Here is the second option and the one I usually do. It is no less bold. It also allows for a recurring joke to come back to throughout the show. I have been doing the glide while making the earlier comments.

I am really not picking up on anything. I'm clearly not warmed up yet, so let's do this the way you would do it. You know, someone who isn't a mindreader; just a reader.

I then simply remove the top envelope, remove the card, and read it.

Someone wrote ... "Hustler."

So what can this tell me? This is someone who is a bit of a joker. They may very well like Hustler, but more likely they just enjoy getting a rise from people, no pun intended. They are well meaning and fun loving. They also masturbate entirely too much.

I am now reinforcing and answering the question of "what can a title tell you about a person," while conditioning the audience for future readings.

One thing to point out here is to wait for your audience to laugh. If you rush, you often take away that opportunity. So, pause and then continue after laughter has died down. Depending on your audience, they may not be sure if they can laugh at masturbation jokes.

Does anyone want to admit to writing this? Dangerous game...playing with a mindreadersir, who I will not point out. Yet.

Now we have an idea of the kind of audience we have here.

Phase II

I need to explain this within the setup of the whole show. Phase Two is a force of a title that will be revealed in a very different manner later in the show. I placed this here because it creates a separation in time between the force of the title and the use of that information. I always try to have these separations, when possible.

I also need to explain the bag. The bag that everyone drops their envelopes into is a gift bag from the dollar store. It isn't anything fancy. I taped two pieces of cardboard together on one long edge and placed this in the bottom of the bag. Now, I can

fold one piece up flat against the side of the bag and load it with force envelopes. I only need a handful. It is taped to the bag to make sure it stays in the up position. Behind the flap are about 10 envelopes all loaded with the same title. This is a dollar store force bag.



How about we take a different approach? I need someone from the front, who can assist. Please, reach into the bag and take out an envelope. Very good.

As I am saying these words, I just walk over, flip the flap down, commenting that there are still a few envelopes left, and give the bag a shake. I then approach the spectator and have him take any random envelope. It won't matter which envelope is taken since they all have the same name.

Now listen carefully. I will step back on stage and I want you to open the envelope, read the name on the card and slip it back into the envelope. Make sense?

Don't say anything out loud and don't let me see it, OK?

Now that you have it in your mind, just answer a few questions for me. Is this a book or story you are familiar with?

Yes, very good. Is there some pivotal scene that you can get in your head?

OK, then really focus on this, please. Run it through your mind like a movie.

I then focus, like I am really trying to get the title.

Sick bastard. Don't think about what you are doing later. Wait, you aren't the one who wrote Penthouse are you? I told you to think of the book. Please think of the book.

Yeah, I've got nothing. You see I think I am trying to interpret another person's favorite book by reading your mind.

Let's get back to you in a bit.

Obviously, I don't pick anything up here. This force comes into play later in the show.

Phase III

In phase three, we get the second title from the other marked envelope and start dealing with our audience. We now need to read the second envelope. It doesn't matter which approach you used, you are now primed for it.

1. If you used the first approach, the unread card is on top, which is where you want it.

2. If you used the second approach the unread card is on bottom. To put it on top, I simply turn my hand over while talking, reversing the order of the stack of envelopes. It is very simple.

I haven't been doing so great, but I think I am really warmed up now. I want to try an easier way first. I am going to read a title and I want everyone to send me the title of their book, just mentally, send it to me.

I take the top envelope, putting the rest of the stack down. I pull out the card and read it, and then replace it in the envelope. I set it apart from the rest of the stack. I want the audience to see how fair and open everything is.

Now I will call the person who wrote that title up on the stage. After asking their name and where they are from, I will ask if it is OK if I give them a reading based on who I think they are. For this, there is no secret, no crib, no anything. I look at them, size them up and tell them what I think of them. You will be amazed how good you can read people if you let your intuition guide you. If you really want a script, a short one is below.

Look at me. You strike me as someone who has a love for the arts. You don't like a lot of restriction in your life and if everything is too well structured, you can feel trapped.

Often you feel like you don't really fit in certain situations and like somewhat of an outsider. People can seem dull to you and you often feel smarter than others. That's okay. It is because you are.

After the reading, I am going to move forward with the reveal. Now, I don't want to just blurt out the title. I want to reveal some information before I get there.

You are the type of person who would like (fiction/nonfiction).

Obviously, I read a title, the one in that envelope, before you came on stage. I was hoping that I could match a title to a person.

I think your book sounds like it is about a faithful pet.

I am picking up on Lassie.

Was that the name of your book?

Now, you can have the spectator remove the card and confirm it is their handwriting and send them back to their seat. In the alternative, you can remove it and hand them the card. This proves that you did just read it and correctly connected it with them. It also shows there was no monkey business as it is their handwriting.

At this point, remember that you don't need to touch the envelopes again. You already know a second title and who wrote it, so stay away from them. I do hope you remembered the title.

Sometimes, someone's story is so apparent; you don't have to read it. It is there. It screams out to you, if you know what to look for.

I call the next spectator on stage.

You can do a reading here if you would like. However, I don't want to be too repetitious. I generally state something like:

I could do a reading on you, but I can already tell you are a really good, nice person. Your title lets me know that. I would like to try something else.

I want you to think of the title of your book. Think about all of the letters and how it is spelled and then jumble them up. I want to see if I can pick up on them.

I then start going through naming letters in their title. I start slowly and then build up going quickly. Obviously, this is only if it is a longer title. Then, I make some other comment about the title, rather than just naming it. I think just blurting out the name isn't as strong.

For instance, one time it was *Charlotte's Web*, so I said that I see a spider, but not a scary one. If you can use this, your spectator will usually have a look of shock on their face, laugh and smile big, something that shows the audience you are right. This is what I want. I want my audience to see that moment of disbelief and amazement. Sometimes, you won't know what the book is about, so you can't always do this. If you can though, it also implies that you know more than just a title; that you are able to pick up more. Either way, I will then conclude by naming the title.

Wrap Up

At the time I was writing this show, I was also watching the BBC series *Sherlock* and wanted to incorporate just a bit of that deductive reasoning. I think it is a little teaser that suggests how I am doing what I am doing. It gives them a false belief to explain things.

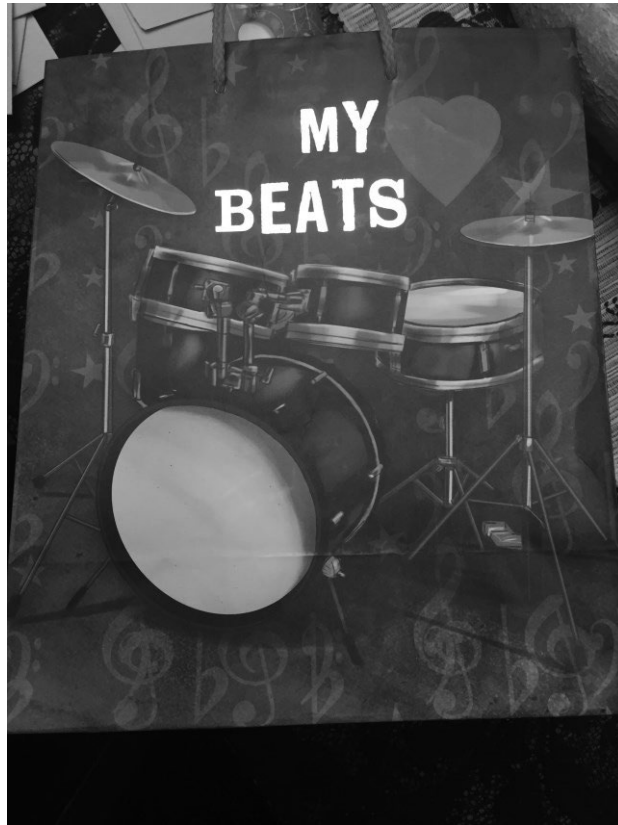
I wasn't sure exactly how to do it, and then I looked at the bag I had bought for this routine. It was kind of strange, but I didn't really think about it when I bought it. Then it hit me. Below is my script. You will have to write your own, as this one is personal to me.

So, now that you have seen some demonstrations, let's talk about what you saw for a minute. I will give you a little insight into how I do what I do.

Look at this bag. It was something I picked up last minute on the way here at the dollar store. I didn't think about it, at least not consciously. However, it tells you something about me.

Look at the bag and tell me what you see. Go ahead, shout it out.

I invite you to try it. Below is a picture of the bag. What would you say this says about me?



Here I invite my audience to respond. One of my favorite responses was a guy who said “it tells me you are cheap.” The whole audience gets a laugh and I get a great story.

Since there is a drumset on it, invariable, someone always says “you are a drummer.”

I am a drummer. It is masculine.

OK, given the fact that you can assume I am a drummer, given my age, and given the kind of performances I do, you could assume that maybe I like hard rock and metal.

If I was a drummer who liked hard rock or metal, then you could also assume that I probably had long hair. If I listened to metal and had long hair, then there was a good chance I was rebelling. Rebelling against what?

The accent undeniably gives me away as Southern, so there is a good chance it was religion. A religious upbringing. That would equate to a strict father, maybe even a preacher. It definitely wasn't the mother, since conservative churches don't allow women in position of power. Could the father even be in the military?

All of which would be accurate, based on the type of bag I chose on a subconscious level.

Nighttime Flight of Fancy

This is another one of those routines where I knew what I wanted to happen; I just wasn't sure how to make it happen. It took some working with the props for me to figure out all of the solutions for this routine.

This is one that I am particularly proud of creating. It is original, it is funny and it looks like real mindreading, thus meeting all of my criteria for a good routine.

I have received some really strong feedback on this piece so that alone let me know I needed to publish it.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The performer invites a spectator on stage. They are asked to pick one of three books, while the performer has his back to the spectator. He is then asked to hide the other two books in a shelf, box or other inaccessible place, while also keeping the book he selected hidden. He is then asked to take a seat.

He is covered with a sheet and then, using a different book, an audience member picks a random page. The spectator on stage is asked to turn to that page and read a random group of words off of the page. He seems to be having trouble.

The performer asks him to try to send what he is seeing, an image. The performer then realizes it is a picture and successfully describes the picture.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: The page number selected by the volunteer is a force. Fishing is used to determine which book the spectator is holding.

I know that there are different ways to do this. Using innocent, ungimmicked books was one of my requirements in performing this routine. I could use three identical books with

different covers. That would avoid the fishing. I don't want to do that though. I like my props to be as innocent as possible. I want to use regular, readable books. Read through all of the detailed explanation and you will see that the fishing isn't that obvious. I also use a little applied psychology, which helps tremendously.

DETAILED EXPLANATION: While I will walk through the routine in detail, I won't reveal which specific books I use. The titles are listed in the script though.

I want you to take the time to find your own books, work out your own fishing questions and become familiar with the technique on your own. This is more than a routine. This is a technique you can apply to many things. I will give you more than enough to be able to do this routine. You will just need to hunt down your own props.

The books I use all look completely different. They are different colors, thicknesses and bindings. This isn't at all necessary, and could be a drawback. If all the books look the same, then the audience cannot think you somehow took a peek. For the sake of convincing the audience that they are all different books I went the other direction.

The three images on my force page are of a man holding a match on one knee in the darkness, some kind of mummified monster looking thing surrounded by people in Victorian dress and a donkey with his head out of the window of a cottage with foxes surrounding it. These are three very different pictures.

I want to take you back in time to your childhood. I love reflecting on childhood and the sense of wonder it brings. But, think back to bedtime. It was probably a fight and something you didn't want to do. However, for me, I remember hearing the television and the muted tones of my parent's voices in the living room and knowing that everything was OK and I was safe.

I believe that an audience wants to know you. Adding bits of information about your own life helps draw in your audience.

They want to know more about you and become invested as you as a person. Being likeable is important in mentalism much more than in magic.

How many of you here would sneak a book and a flashlight under the covers to read when you were a kid? We already know Mr. Hustler probably did. When I was a kid, I would read classics. Maybe that is why my parents never yelled at me to turn the light off. I thought I was being sneaky, but I am pretty sure they knew.

You know now days, I wish my kid would do that. Today it is Netflix or the Nintendo DS. Reading would be a welcome change.

When I read, I see things very visually. I can imagine the scenes, the characters and the actions. The words are transformed in my mind to images. I was able to get under the sheet, read that book and be swept away to a different time, a different land.

I want relive those times with someone who is particularly imaginative.

You may have noticed earlier in the explanation, I referred to my spectator in the masculine. That is because I always pick a man for this; preferably one in a hat or who is bald or otherwise doesn't have finely coiffed hair. Since I am going to be covering them with a sheet, I don't want to mess up anyone's hair. In the South messing up a woman's hair is an offense to be met with a stern scolding at the very least if not a beating after the show.

I asked you guys to write down one of your favorite books from when you were a kid and now I will share three of my favorites with you. I have The Time Machine, the Tales of Edgar Allen Poe and Aesop's Fables.

Now I address my spectator, giving careful instructions.

I am going to step forward and I would like you to take any book that you would like. Please don't allow me to see which book you chose. It is your little secret.

My table on stage has a shelf behind it. I want you to take the other two books and hide them on that shelf so that I cannot see which book you have in your hand.

After you take the book, please have a seat and hide the book from view. It is important that I cannot see it.

Once the spectator has made his selection and informs you of that, make sure to confirm he has his selected book hidden before you turn around.

Now, I want to make this trip back in time a little more realistic for you.

At this point, I unfold a sheet that has been under my table up front. As I shake it open, people realize what is going to happen and I get a good laugh. I have been tempted to get some children's sheets and probably will when I find some in a thrift store. Right now I just use sheets from home.

Don't worry, I washed the sheet. Three years ago.

Here, please take this flashlight.

I also have a small LED flashlight that I hand the spectator so that he can see under the sheet.

I am going to have an audience member help me, using this book. I want to truly make this random. I am going to flip through this book and just tell me where you want me to stop.

The number force is extremely easy. I use another book to force the number. The book I use is the book of Tennyson's poetry which I will use in the next routine. It is sitting beside me,

so its use makes sense. I look around as if not sure what I am going to do and then my eyes light upon the book.

I ask a spectator in the audience to tell me when to stop flipping pages. I start from the back of the book. The Tennyson book is much longer than any of the other three books, so as long as I flip slowly, I will remain on pages with a high page number. When she tells me to stop, I do so immediately. I then show her the page number. It is clean and above board.

I then address my spectator on stage.

Can you please turn to page 532?

Of course they can't, because there aren't that many pages. They will say no, and then I ask them why not, letting them tell me that there aren't that many pages. As they are saying this it dawns on me.

Oh I probably should have started from the front.

OK, let's try again.

We are going to force the page number this time. Originally, I would flip through again and legitimately stop where she said stop. I would then be back to stage center and I would turn the book around, but the numbers were too small to see. I would just say, "OK, we have page ninety-eight." It didn't matter which page I stopped on, I would always call ninety-eight. I know it is very bold. It is also effective.

With that being said though, I am always looking at the weakest part of my routine and I want to make it stronger. So, why not show her the page? The solution was simple. I put the card that I use in the Tennyson book test into the book on page ninety-eight. This creates a break, allowing me to instantly flip to page ninety-eight. Now, I can instantly flip there, allowing me to show the spectator her page. I just make sure to cover the card with my hand.

One other solution is to break your spine or glue at that page. That will make flipping to that page almost automatic.

Do you have a flashlight on under there?

Are you sleeping?

Now can you please turn to page 98 in the book. I want you to scan down to the middle of the page, and silently, please silently, only in your head, read some of the words on the middle of the page. Don't say anything at all. It is critically important that you don't utter a single phrase. This all succeeds or fails based on what has already happened.

As I said, I pick up on images very visually and I am trying to get an image from you. I am getting darkness though.

All of the above lines are said at a fast pace so that the spectator can't get an opportunity to interject. I made a minor change in the lines and I now say, "if you do speak out now, you will ruin this routine and it will all be your fault." For whatever reason, this always gets a laugh. It doesn't seem that funny to me.

Now I stop for a few seconds. Total silence.

Uh oh. I didn't ask you an important question. Can you read?

After this line, I add, "Hey, I am from Arkansas. That is a relevant question."

Yes, you can? OK, then oh, wait. I am seeing an image but a still one. There aren't words on that page are there?

No, it is an image. It has multiple figures in it, doesn't it?

If they answer no to this question, then I instantly know which book they are looking at because only one book has a picture on the force page with a solitary figure.

This question about the multiple figures is often my first fishing question because there is a two out of three chance that I would be correct based on the content of the pictures. I have started playing with this idea some though and I found that the book that is in the middle is often chosen. It doesn't have multiple figures. So, if I put that book in the middle, then I have a different fishing question.

I see a human in the picture, correct?

If they answer yes:

But there are not multiple figures are there?

The answer to these two questions gives me which picture they are looking at. If they respond that there is no human figure, then that too gives me my answer. I will provide a few more comments for each picture. Even once I know the picture, I don't just instantly reveal it. By providing a few more details, which are correct, it helps to disguise the fishing method. Remember that to you, this is just a one out of three guess but to your spectator, it is a single page out of thousands of pages. In fact, point that out.

Keep in mind that there were literally thousands of pages to choose from up here. You selected the book sir, and you ma'am in the audience selected the page. This was totally outside of my control.

1. If it is the picture of mummified creature: *There is something that looks like a creature. I guess it is humanoid, but it is the centerpiece. This is what I was seeing. It is a monster, with people around it.*

2. If it is the picture of a man on one knee: *I picked up on darkness earlier. I thought it was because you couldn't read or because of the picture, but darkness makes sense doesn't it? I am seeing something like this.*

At this point, I drop to one knee with my hand in the air, mimicking the pose of the man in the illustration. I also invite my audience to take out their cell phones and take a picture, since the person on stage can't see what I am doing. Now, they have a picture of the show and can post it. Thanks to Joe Diamond for that suggestion.

3. If it is the picture with the animals: *Wait, why are you calling me a jackass? Oh, there are words on the page, right? There is a house. Jackass, why jackass? Oh, I am seeing a donkey and foxes, correct?*

Now, I continue to the ending. I want the spectator to show everyone the image in the book.

I am going to uncover you. Please show everyone the image.

Thank you.

Tennyson Book Test

As I stated earlier, I really liked this book test and wanted to include it in this show. The previous section on *The Odditorium* contains the script that I carried in to this show. I wanted to strengthen the impression and the fact that the book is completely normal, so I chose to use it in the previous effect for the purpose of forcing a page.

I also wanted to have something more there, something to tie Tennyson to other routines. Therefore, I chose to continue on using Tennyson in the next routine and a piece form that in the following routine. This gives a sense of coherence and continuity.

Emotional Connection

This part of the routine is not always done in my show. For the Fringe Festival I had to take this out, though it was a part of the original script and I had performed it many times. There simply wasn't enough room for it in the time allotted. There will be a bit of overlap between this and the next routine, as the next is meant to stand on its own, assuming this isn't performed.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The performer mixes up and hands out five different photos. Five people are called onto stage and they are asked to really concentrate on the photos, to really look at them and try to connect with what they see; to feel the emotion and to put themselves there.

The performer then describes what each of the spectators is looking at.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: Five marked or unmarked as the case may be, cards.

DETAILED EXPLANATION: Well, the simple explanation pretty much sums it up. The marks are visible across a stage but still pass by without being noticed at all. Take a look at the photo.





Those big splotches are your marks. Starting with the top left hand corner, they are marked in a clockwise fashion. Look at the photo below.

One photo has one person, one photo has two, one has three and one has horizontal orientation. Only three photos are marked. The first marked card has the one person, the second has two and so on. The horizontal card isn't marked because I can just watch and see who turns their card. The fifth and final photo is that of Tennyson. It is unmarked for reasons you will understand in the next routine.

A picture is worth a thousand words. If that phrase is true, then can an entire book be conveyed in a single image? Well, I guess a thousand words is just a short story.

In the Victorian Era photography was in its infancy and anytime there is new technology, people often use it in strange ways.

Think about it. Before cell phones, it was really difficult to send someone a picture of your genitals. You could take a picture on your camera, but then you would have to take it to Wal-Mart and hope they would develop it. Then you would have to hope the creepy developer guy didn't keep a picture. After all, he would be set for blackmail, since he has your name and address. Finally, you would have to mail it to someone and hope the wrong person didn't open it.

Now, click and send and you are done.

These lines get really good audience response. Take your time in delivering them and let your audience laugh. Of course, you have to decide if they are appropriate for your audience, but I recommend them if you can get away with it.

One hundred years from now people will likely wonder why anyone would text a picture of their genitalia...or maybe they will just be turned on.

In the Victorian Era, they liked to take pictures of the dead. Not many people take pictures of the dead now a day. If they do, they certainly aren't posing with them.

I have a collection of these photos.

As I am saying these lines, I am mixing them face down.

Each of you, please take a photo. I have mixed them so none of us knows who has what. In a moment, I am going to ask you to turn your photo around. I want you to look at the scene on the photo, to really concentrate on it.

Look as though you are looking through the eyes of one there. Though the photos aren't in color, look as though they are. Feel what you would feel if you were there, if the dead were your child, your father, your daughter.

These lines are said for several reasons. First, I want to have enough time to figure out who is holding which card. Secondly, having your spectator invested emotionally provides for better theater. I want my audience to care. Finally, it provides the explanation for my next line.

When someone feels strong emotions, you can pick up on that. You are able to do so. That is why a movie or play can make someone cry. Empathy. I want to see if I can pick up on your empathy.

There isn't much more to explain. I describe what each person is looking at. You need to really sell this aspect of the routine. This IS the routine. Channel the feelings of these people. Describe the surroundings. This can be a powerfully moving presentation. It can be very dark. You can describe how the people died. No one can contradict you.

Think about what you are presenting. Since you are correctly describing the scene that the spectator is looking at, all other descriptions are also correct. Describe that which cannot be confirmed first, then narrow in and you can start asking your spectator of what you are describing is correct. The assumption must be that EVERYTHING you have described is correct.

One thing I don't ever do is allude to the number of people. That hints at the method. In fact, the one with one person actually has three images. It is a dead child and two angels. However, the angels are an early form of Photoshop, so to speak. I describe the composition, the way they look and I describe the color of eyes and hair. Remember it is black and white photography, but you can still get an idea.

If you are having trouble seeing the mark, then you could just have them put the picture face down in your hand. Tell the spectator that you want them to recreate the scene solely in their mind. You have to collect the photos regardless, so this shouldn't seem strange.

While I was concerned about this, I have never had to do it. While it is not unusual to not be able to see the mark you are looking for, you can use the process of elimination. You can always see some of the marks, and you can do your reading on those first.

I save the one with Tennyson for last.

I got some kind of a different feeling from you. It wasn't the same as the others. That is why I saved you for last. Please show the audience which card you have.

When he does this, I walk back behind my table and launch into the next routine at the point where I switch stacks. Read on for an explanation.

Looking at Death

This is a sort of living and dead test using a pendulum, combined with psychometry, but happening completely in the spectator's hands, without my interference. That basically is what I set out to do. How can the pendulum be completely under their control, yet the pendulum always reacts in the proper manner? There are probably electronic means or magnets or something, but I like my stuff to be as gimmick free as possible.

This is another routine that I had done with a different presentation in the past. The response is well worth the extremely easy method. The previous presentation I used in performance involved names but still the basic premise of an object finding its owner. I thought that it needed more. Photos are more eye catching than names. What could draw the spectators in even more? I finally hit upon my answer.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The performer shows Victorian death portraits. One of the photos however is a live person. The photos are mixed well and laid out in a line. An audience member is taught how to use a pendulum, which is purported to be the monacle of Tennyson.

Using the monacle, the audience member passes the monacle over each face down photograph. The monacle reacts to one of them. The picture is turned over, showing it to be the picture of Tennyson.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: This is nothing more but a wholesale switch of the pictures and good presentation. Five different photos are switched for five photos that are all the exact same.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION: I should disclose that I sell very limited numbers of the sets to do this effect as well as the Tennyson book test and several others, under the name of

Victoriana. The props are often outside of the skill level of many. As for the cabinet cards, they all need to be the same size. They also need to be a decent enough size for your audience to see them. To meet these criteria, I created and aged my own photos.

This method is very ballsy. It is bold, but with a combination of wording and blocking, I do believe that the switch goes completely unnoticed. Read the script and explanation below and I think you will agree.

The script below does not pick up from the previous section. It is repeated here so I can illustrate how I move into the routine, assuming I didn't perform the previous piece.

A picture is worth a thousand words. If that phrase is true, then can an entire book be conveyed in a single image? Well, I guess a thousand words is just a short story.

In the Victorian Era photography was in its infancy and anytime there is new technology, people often use it in strange ways.

Think about it. Before cell phones, it was really difficult to send someone a picture of your genitals. You could take a picture on your camera, but then you would have to take it to Wal-Mart and hope they would develop it. Then you would have to hope the creepy developer guy didn't keep a picture. After all, that is blackmail there, since he has your name and address. Finally, you would have to mail it to someone.

Now, click and send and you are done.

These lines get really good audience response. Take your time in delivering them and let your audience laugh. Of course, you have to decide if they are appropriate for your audience, but I recommend them if you can get away with it.

One hundred years from now people will likely wonder why anyone would text a picture of their genitalia...or maybe they will just be turned on.

In the Victorian Era, they liked to take pictures of the dead. Not many people take pictures of the dead now a day. If they do, they certainly aren't posing with them.

At this point, I walk behind my table and remove a small packet wrapped in cloth. These are wrapped in cloth and the others below them so that I don't fumble or get them mixed up. I have the first set of pictures stacked with the Tennyson card at the back of the face up stack. I want to be able to show the audience each of the pictures and comment on them, saving Tennyson for last.

As I am speaking, I unwrap the photos.



I have a collection of these Victorian era death portraits. Thankfully I have a good network of unusual friends who keep on the lookout for this type of thing. People, posing with the dead as though they are alive.

By stating the above lines, I am subconsciously leading them away from the method. These are unique and unusual photos. There couldn't be multiples that are exactly the same.

When I get to the last picture, I call up an audience member.

Can you please show everyone this image?

At this point, I hand the picture to the audience member and I walk behind my table. I do the switch and I get out the monocle all at the same time. It is a very fluid motion. There is but one quick duck of my hands behind the table.

To do this, it is important that you have things where they need to be. As mentioned, I wrap all of the photos I am going to show the audience in a cloth. The duplicates are below this. Therefore, it is quick to pick up the proper photos at the beginning and I know which ones are the duplicates. The monocle is set to the right. The right hand picks up the monocle, while the left hand sets down the first set of photos and picks up the duplicates. As I am doing all of this I am talking.

Can everyone see the photo?

As soon as you ask this, everyone will direct their attention to the photo that your spectator is holding. This is when you do the switch. The spectator is downstage and I am upstage. They are physically closer and they have the object everyone needs to see.

Another thing, which I started doing is to separate myself physically from the photos as soon as they are on the table. I immediately place them on the table and then step forward. The spectacle is in a small glassine envelope. I step forward to stand

beside the spectator while opening the envelope and removing the monocle. During all of this, I am also speaking.

Does anyone know who this is in the photo?

I wait for an answer. Rarely, but occasionally, someone recognizes who it is.

This is Lord Alfred Tennyson. Not much of a looker was he? This is not a death portrait of Tennyson. Out of these pictures, he is the only one who is not deceased. Well, at least at the time of the photo.

Previously, I would have the spectator step back and join me and I would explain the pendulum. However, I believe that staying downstage and away from the table helps create a distance both visually and in time. Therefore, I say the next several lines standing with the spectator downstage.

This is a monocle that used to belong to Lord Alfred Tennyson. At least that is what the eBay ad said.

It is believed that items that belonged to someone in life can retain some of their power.

These lines prepare the audience for the next routine as well as connect with those who believe in psychometry. If you aren't aware, psychometry isn't just a magic book term. There are those who believe in psychometry. Magicians and mentalists have just co-opted the term to apply to a certain kind of trick.

If so, then maybe it is possible that Lord Alfred's monocle can find his portrait.

At this point, I ask the spectator if they have used a pendulum before and if not, I explain how it works. Actually, I do it either way. Even if a spectator says they know how they work, they could be referring to ideomotor response, how someone else taught them or may not know at all. If you want a spectator to do

something and you don't carefully explain, then any failure falls on you. Clear instructions are paramount in mentalism.

At this point, I have them walk behind the table with me. I take the one photo from them and mix it with the other, keeping them all face down. I then spread them out over the table in a row and let the spectator start dowsing. It doesn't matter what the spectator does because all five face down photos are of Tennyson.

It is better when there isn't much movement and it takes a bit of time. Frankly, I don't want like it when we get a positive on the first card. It ends too quickly but you certainly can't have them move on. What if more than one gets a positive response? Then you have a problem.

When there isn't an immediate positive response, the spectator sometimes gets nervous as if they are somehow messing up. I assure them all is fine and to just move to the next one. Eventually you will get a positive response. The technique is just to wait. Between awkwardness on stage and a fatiguing arm, the pendulum will move.

When this happens, I immediately scoop up the other photos, putting them away. I slide the one over to the spectator and ask him/her to show the audience. I want to get the other photos off the table. As soon as they show the photo, I then take the pendulum, shake their hand, and direct them back to their seat.

So, what if you don't use a table when you perform? This can be accomplished just as easily by using a box and doing the switch out of it. I have done this as well.

Second Attempt

At this point, I go back to my earlier spectator, the one who had drawn the forced book out of the bag. The implication is that at this point, I am warmed up so I should be able to pick up on what he is thinking.

Sir, I want to get back to you. I haven't forgotten about you. I need you to try this again, please. This time I want you to think about a setting in the book. Can you think of any specific setting?

Very good. Send it to me.

Sick, sick. You really should see a therapist.

I am definitely not, getting a book. I will come back to you later.

Hunting Women in the Dark

One of my favorite books on magic is *Garden of the Strange* by Caleb Strange. If you haven't read it, then I recommend that you do so, not for its mindblowingly new techniques, but for its completely fresh and original approach to performing magic and mentalism. It is likely unlike anything you have ever read in the genre.

The first routine in the book is "Hunting Mammoths in the Rain." It is truly a beautiful piece, but not one that I felt fit in with my set. Additionally, I don't want to use someone else's script wholesale in my show. However, that piece directly inspired this one and the same basic method is used. I have performed this enough that I think I have brought some additions that help make the routine stronger by adding more hits.

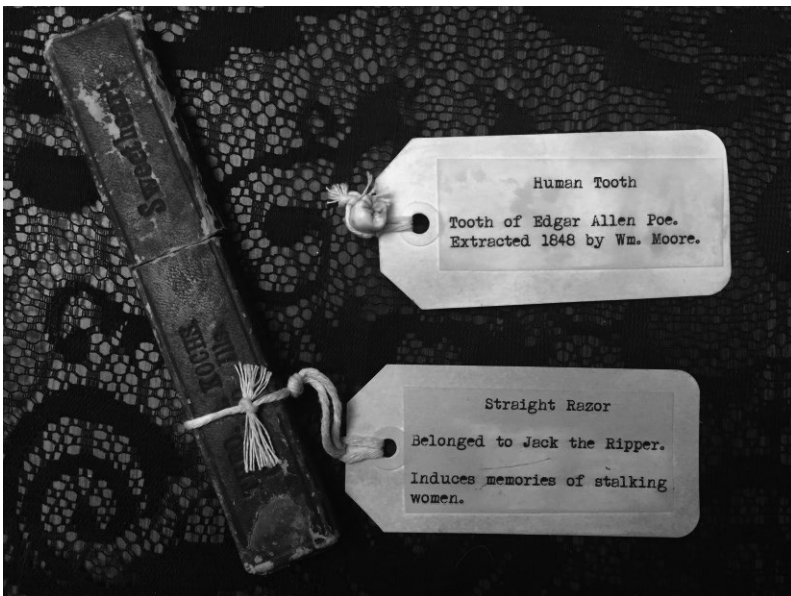
I can't recommend *Garden of the Strange* enough. Go get it. Now.

Rick Roth from Outlaw saw me perform this and described it as "a very emotional "channeling" end to one of his performances." I had not really thought about the piece as an example of channeling, but that then changed by approach to performing the piece.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The performer explains how items can sometimes carry the energy of their owners. He hands some items out to the audience to look at.

A spectator on stage selects one item from a box and returns it. The performer explains that the items she selects should induce a specific memory related to that item. The performer then taps into the past memory of the spectator even, seeing the exact items she held in her hands.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: All of the items have tags on them explaining what they are. The three items left in the box are all different, but all belonged to Jack the Ripper and the tags at the bottom all say “Induces memories of stalking women.”



DETAILED EXPLANATION: Pay attention to the wording, because it is really key. Giving very detailed instructions, and repeating them more than once, is also critical. This routine can and will go awry without proper audience management. I performed this enough to learn that. I performed it many, many times for ghost tours before incorporating it into a show.

What if you could travel to one of your favorite novels, actually be a character? How about someone from history?

What if you could do anything you wanted and it wouldn't matter because it is all fiction? What would you do? Would you rob a bank? Would you kill someone? Something else you would rather not say?

As we just saw with Tennyson's monocle, it is believed that specific artifacts can help make a connection, a bridge if you will between the person holding them and whatever they may be connected to in the past. Basically, the idea is that these items can implant a memory from the past.

I have antiques here. In a few moments, I want to pass some of them around, but please be gentle with them and please return them. Can I count on everyone to be honest?

Sometimes, at this point, I will have the audience members raise their hands and make some goofy oath with a terrible curse befalling them if they fail to return my items. It is for laughs, but also reminds them that these are my artifacts and I want them back.

All of them have different stories attached to them. Different dates, different locations. They are all from the same period, however. You see these were all a part of a "cabinet of curiosities" which is something that people would have in their homes in the Victorian Era and onward. It was a sort of small museum. They would have fossils, skulls, maybe a hornet's nest, and other little trinkets. An extreme example of this was Barnum's museum.

Each of the items has a tag attached to it explaining what the item is. People were proud to have unusual things. They could be very expensive. So, these tags could be true or they could simply be made up. I don't know.

These items are all indeed tagged. However, they give a general description, as well as a date. They don't have anything at the bottom in regard to memories. Take a look at the photo of the items. The items I use are all real. I use an actual human tooth, monocle and other items. Originally, the cards were hand written with a dip pen on aged tags. However, I switched to a typewriter font after discovering that the handwritten tags were sometimes difficult to read. I want to sell this idea as legitimate. Don't make your stuff look and feel cheap. This takes away from the seriousness of your performance.

Before I pass the items out, I need a spectator on stage. I don't want her to touch the other item, which gives some cover for my explanation for how she is to handle the items in the box.

I need someone to come up here with me. Please have a seat. Close your eyes. Now breathe in deeply and then exhale. I want you to continue breathing in and out.

Completely clear your mind as you do so. I don't want you to think of anything at all. Clear your mind of anything you may have to do later, your job, kids, whatever.

Continue to breathe in and out. I don't want you to touch any items yet, because as I stated, items can sometimes carry the energies of their owners. It is important that you don't get "tainted" so to speak with the energy of various items.

What I want from you is something different. I would like you to reach into the box and pick up the first item you touch. Don't think about it and don't look around too much. I want a truly random choice.

Once you have your item, don't let anyone know what it is, especially me. I want you to read everything on the tag very carefully, very carefully. This is important that you understand what is written. The item will provide you the specific memory. It won't be a memory from your past; it will be associated with the item. After you read everything, return the item to the box, closing the lid. Let me know when you have done this. Does that all make sense? Terrific.

You cannot take too much time in making sure that your spectator understands this. Even with explicit instructions, about twenty-five percent of the time, when I later ask if the item suggested a certain memory, I still get a “no” response. If they understood the instructions and read the card carefully, they will have a memory implanted. Notice I say did the object suggest a memory. This is a bit of dual reality as the audience has a different perspective than the person on stage. The audience members all looked at items with nothing written on the card. The spectator on stage assumes they all had specific memories written on them.

While you want to hear a “yes” in response to the question of whether the item suggested a memory, it isn't critical to the success of the routine. There are multiple additional hits that completely cover this.

Now I don't want you to be tainted by what the others see, so I would ask you to take your item and focus on it, while the audience looks at some of these items.

I step well forward of the spectator and let her select an item and read the tag. When she tells me she is done, I address her.

I want you to take yourself to the place and time suggested by the item. Place yourself in that location and that time. I want you to see your surroundings, smell the smells, feel whatever emotions you would feel. I want to travel there with you.

At this point, I used to ask if the item suggested a memory. This isn't the right time to ask it, because if they say "no", then it is awkward. How can you ask them to step into a memory that they don't have? I removed that and changed the wording as reflected above.

Here in stage shows, I change the light and music comes on. I pause for a bit, while trying to "connect." The entire monologue below is given in halting speech as if it is coming through a little at a time. I also tried to be very descriptive, involving scent, touch, and sound, all of the senses.

I am there now. We are inside, it is dark, it is noisy, smoky. I can smell sweet tobacco and sour sweat. Gin and beer. I smell alcohol. I can taste it in my mouth. Juniper.

I have to escape this place. I am getting up and leaving. I place a coin down on the bar. It is smoothly polished wood, but sticky. The coin is foreign. Copper. Something I haven't seen in a long time.

I walk towards the door and there is a small pane of glass. I see my reflection. Cold, blue steely eyes. Parted hair and long wiry beard. I put my top hat on and walk out.

Cold air hits my face as the door opens. I can fill my lungs with clean air now. Outside it is dark. Flickering light. The ground under my feet it is uneven. It is hard.

Cobblestones. The cobblestones are lit faintly by gaslight. I walk over these cobblestone streets, my boots echoing off the stones. Then I stop.

I can't really see anything. I am standing still, but there is motion around me. I am waiting on something. What am I waiting for?

I shoot down an alleyway. I rest my back against cold hard stone. I can't see anything. My breathing starts to get heavy.

I hear footsteps and they stop. A man and woman's voice. They are negotiating something. They leave. My breathing becomes heavier and heavier.

I feel excitement, intense excitement. My heart starts to race as I hear footsteps coming towards me. Light ones. It is a woman. I reach into a heavy wool coat and remove a straight razor. One men use to shave. It is in a box. Then I see her. I spring into action and I pull out a blade and....blood. Lots of blood.

What was your memory?

The phrase what was your memory, doesn't directly ask the spectator if they had one, but reinforces your claim earlier that it would suggest one. This is the way I chose to handle this. If they look confused, then simply ask, "what was the item you looked at?"

Keep in mind that sometimes when performing this, you have a spectator that is really creeped out or simply flabbergasted, so they may take a bit to speak. This has happened more than once, when I have performed this. You can take your time.

They generally say something about Jack the Ripper, if they don't directly say "stalking women." I then want them to name the specific item. The three items I use are an old straight razor in a box, a picture of a man that is reputed to be one of the Jack the Ripper suspects and a British penny from 1888. If you go back and look at my monologue, I reference all three of those specific items. The coin is placed on the bar, the picture is referenced in the description of the reflection and the razor is used at the end.

When the spectator names the item, I then point out that I saw that very item and call their attention to the bit of the monologue where it was mentioned.

For a video of performance, go here:

<https://youtu.be/lwScBh7ZM1Y>



Drawing

I plan continuing legal education in my day job and as part of that, I get requests from all kinds of people to come and speak to our groups. One of those guys drew items upside down. Primarily, he did portraits. That really inspired me to try to incorporate this idea into an act. Think about it. If you are really psychic and things don't always come in crystal clear, wouldn't it make sense that something could come in upside down?

Aside from that, I have a background in art and worked on my Masters in Art before going to law school. I wanted to be able to somehow incorporate art into the show. This seemed the perfect idea. I then spoke to a friend of mine who alerted me to the fact that Derren Brown also does an upside down drawing. That didn't deter me from performing mine, as there are clearly others out there doing upside drawings in all different types of performance.

It occurred to me that this would be the perfect place to make use of that force at the beginning and a way to keep coming back to a spectator. I really like being able to do that, having the running theme throughout the show.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The performer attempts to pick up on a randomly selected book that a spectator drew earlier. He places pen to paper and starts making marks. It is all indecipherable until the picture is turned upside down and then it is the central character of the book.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: The book is forced as described earlier using the force bag. The image is already lightly drawn onto the paper using an opaque projector and pencil.

DETAILED EXPLANATION: I don't think there is much more detail to add. This section will primarily cover the scripting, which there is also fairly little of.

Sir, I want to get back to you. One more time, please. Now this time, please be serious.

I want you to just think of the main character, of the one scene you can imagine, and of the title. Maybe something will come through.

I want to try some free association. This is where I just put a marker down on paper and see what comes to me.

I now walk to the easel and turn over a new page. I have music start playing at this point. I scribble and then discuss with my audience how I was an English major, so I have very good penmanship. At this point, I am purposely blocking the view of the paper. I step aside and ask if it looks like any words are visible. This usually gets a laugh, as it is just scribbles.

I then continue to work, explaining how some of the best authors came up with books out of the blue. How Bram Stoker conceived of Dracula when he had a nightmare about a "vampire king" rising from his grave, caused by eating too much crabmeat covered with mayonnaise sauce. How Frankenstein was conceived when there was contest as to who could write the best horror story and it was written in one night, and how Sleepy Hollow was written based on Dutch tales that were told to Irving as a child.

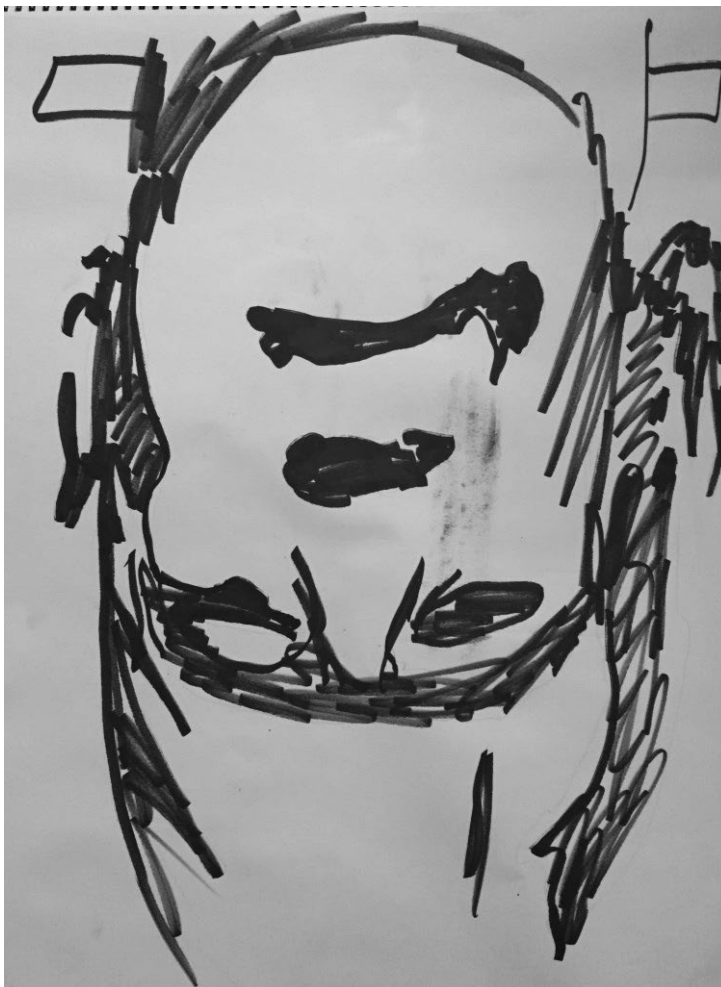
I need to point out that one of these three books is always my force. I rotate them from show to show. So, whichever book is the force, I won't mention yet. I just mention the other two.

As I am talking I step aside and ask if any words are visible now. It is even more of a mess.

Then I continue on about my other great love; art. I explain how I worked on my masters in art but couldn't really figure out a way to make it profitable.

By this time, I am pretty close to finishing. I will then mention one other fun story, as a bit of an aside, as though I forgot. It will be the story mentioned previously about the origin of the writing of the force book. I have my back to the audience and I let whatever happen, happen. Maybe the audience member will say something, maybe he won't.

Either way, I then show the image, still upside down. I am looking down at it, at which point, I realize it is a picture, not words. I state as much to the audience, turning it over and revealing the character from the book.



Time Travel

When I wrote my script, I knew exactly how I wanted everything to end. The problem is that I didn't know how to make that ending happen. The basic idea is confabulation. I wanted to hand out a sealed envelope at the start of the show and have predictions about the future, which are in this sealed envelope, revealed at the end.

Another requirement for me is that I wanted it to be a full sized envelope. Nothing small or unusual or weird, just the type of envelope everyone is familiar with. That is what created the problem. There were a lot of confabulation ideas with small envelopes and things you hold onto but not of that met my criteria.

I found everything I could on confabulation, but I couldn't find a method that worked for me, at least not completely. I kept pondering on how to make it work, and then it came to me. Right before I fell asleep, I conceived a method. It went into testing and I quickly saw it would be workable. While the basic idea isn't new, I believe that this application of the idea is new.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE: The performer tells a bit about his childhood and his habit of trying to predict the future. He references the envelope which was handed out earlier and calls the spectator on stage, reminding everyone that the envelope has been in her possession since the start of the show.

The envelope is opened, a letter is removed and it is otherwise shown empty. The spectator reads along with the performer. The letter contains specific predictions, such as the age provided in the magic square routine, the clothing and general description of the book that the gentleman randomly drew from the bag, other details, and ends with a very specific description of an audience member, including the clothing she is wearing as well as her favorite book from childhood, which she had written earlier and placed in the bag.

SIMPLE EXPLANATION: The prediction letter makes use of multiple techniques for the information. Some is generalized information, some relies on forces, some is preshow and some is written using a window envelope.

The explanation is admittedly detailed, but the working isn't as complicated as it may sound. Read the detailed explanation and it should all make sense.

DETAILED EXPLANATION: I will start by providing the script, and then I will break down the letter explaining how the information is obtained, forced or otherwise gathered.

As you probably gathered, when I was younger, I spent a lot of time reading. It was my escape. Believe it or not, I wasn't always the most popular kid in school. I played in band. I will admit it, I played Dungeons and Dragons, and I liked metal music.

Now, I also was a skater and was a starter on the football team. I also was an artist, so put all of that together and psychoanalyze me!

When I had those bad days, getting picked on or made fun of, I would go to the one place where I was always safe. My books. I would imagine being transported to another world and I would imagine that maybe some of what I read could happen.

One of my all-time favorites was "The Time Machine" by H.G. Wells. Who hasn't dreamt of being able to travel in time? If I could do that, I could jump forward and know what my life would be like. I thought that maybe if I dreamed enough, it could happen. Maybe it did?

The Time Machine is one of the three books used earlier in "Nighttime Flight of Fancy." If the spectator chose that book, then I also reference that he must have been drawn to that book for that reason.

When I was about 15, I made predictions and sealed them in envelopes; predictions about the future. These were dated predictions. There were a lot of them. I was a bit of a teenage Nostradamus. Stacks of these things, all written and torn out of a notebook and sealed in an envelope and then carefully dated with a future date.

Through moves, marriages and divorces, I kept those envelopes. There is one that has today's date on it. You see, I had no choice. I had to perform tonight. It would be the only way to know if I can really time travel, because if I can say what is going to happen in the future, well time travel is the only explanation, right?

Throughout the evening, I have had random information supplied to me on stage. Your favorite book, your ridiculous words supplied by you sir as my assistant throughout the evening. I appreciate your being a good sport. A random page number. People wrote information on cards.

I gave someone that envelope before we began and I haven't touched it since. Can I please have you come up on stage?

What you say can create reality. I specifically say I gave the envelope to someone before we started. That isn't really true. I gave it to them after the first routine, but it was so early, they aren't likely to remember and they have no idea what is in the envelope.

Please confirm the envelope has been with you the entire time. You didn't hand it off to anyone did you?

Please hand me the envelope. I want to pull out a piece of paper. Please keep in mind I wrote this when I was 15. The handwriting probably isn't that good, so I will read it and I want you to read it along with me.

Please confirm that the date on the envelope is tonight's date.

I want to point out, that I do show the spectator the inside of the envelope. I don't want them to think there was some kind of switch or something sneaky. If it is all white, the label is also white, and if you move quickly, there is really nothing to see.

This is my finale. I don't want a spectator stumbling over the words, not able to read them. I am going to read it, but I give an explanation as to why, because of my bad handwriting. In reality I need to control the pacing and tone.

When this letter is read, I give plenty of time for the audience to react. I go slowly, letting them absorb what was predicted. Much of the letter is written like a riddle, so I want them to figure out the reference if possible.

Let's walk through the contents of the letter and I will explain each step. Most of the letter is prewritten well before the show, saving me time and hassle. I have very little that actually needs to be done either right before the show or during. The parts that are written in with either pre-show or directly on stage will be in bold in the sections detailing the letter contents.

Also, to make things a bit more coherent, I will list the steps below in the order they take place, with more detail below:

1. Make your windowed envelope.
2. Mark the spot for your number to be written in during the show.
3. Pre-write all that you possibly can.
4. Put the letter in the envelope but don't seal it yet.
5. Use pre-show to get the name of a book and description of an audience member. Do the same if you are using an impression pad to get the age of a person.
6. Add that information to the letter.

7. Seal the letter and add the date label, leaving it open.
8. Paperclip it to the clipboard.
9. Write the number as soon as you get it during your routine.
10. Hand the envelope out.

All of this will be explained in more detail below, but I thought it was important to understand the general flow and steps first.

A man in dark clothes at the front will have a dirty mind. He can't concentrate. However, I know he will be thinking of a monster. The monster will be seen but he will obscure himself.

This is the reference to the forced book title and drawing. Obviously, all of this can be pre-written. Keep in mind that all three of my forces are different monsters, so this is easy to keep generic. You could even specifically name the book since it is a force, but since we are specifically naming a book later, this just seemed a little too much.

How about the man in the front in dark clothing? Notice it doesn't say the front row, just "at the front" and it doesn't say "black" it just says dark clothing. I assure you, there will be a male near the front in dark clothing. When you get ready to force the book, just look for a man in dark clothing and walk to him.

I was also trying to think of how some of Nostradamus' predictions would read. I liked that last sentence about being seen but obscured. It is accurate but doesn't say, "you will draw him upside down."

A fun trip to childhood. A gift maybe. Something that doesn't make sense.

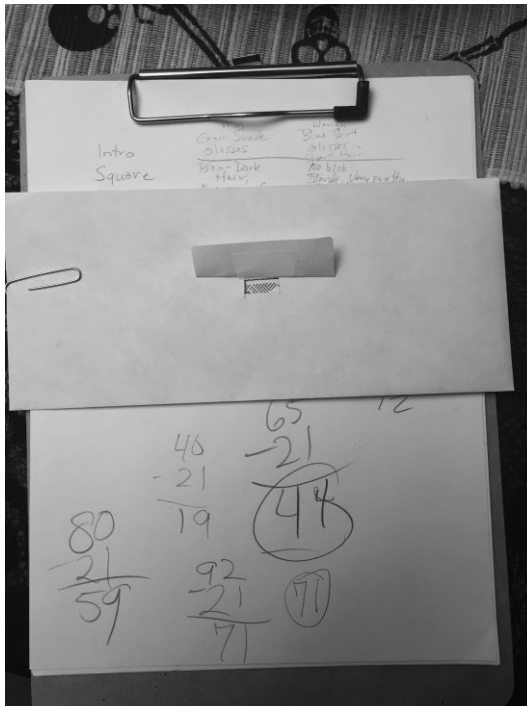
This is in regard to the one ahead routine, which I use in both *The Odditorium* and *Bibliomancer*. As I discussed earlier, I usually miss on the Christmas gift. I get close, but not quite correct.

Someone has a dirty mind. Not a teenager but thinks like one.

The number [] will be relevant for some reason. Maybe a relative? You won't know it but somehow the age will reveal itself.

This is a bit of solid and random information I wanted in the letter to help confirm that it is real. This is where I make use of the windowed envelope.

The envelope itself is very simple. Cut a small window in the front, about the size of one line height of notebook paper. Take a look at the photo to get an idea of the size.



Once you have cut your window, tear out a sheet of notebook paper and fold it. Now, using a pencil, lightly draw a box on the notebook paper that lines up with the opening. You will now know where to leave space in your letter when you will later write the number.

You probably notice the flap above as well. This is just a mailing label with a piece of paper stuck to the back. The front of this label bears the date of the show. I thought about this flap but couldn't figure out why in the hell someone would put that on an envelope. That is how I came around to the idea of a date. Now, it makes sense. It is a label with a purpose. The piece of paper on the back keeps the label from sticking to my letter. Make sure it is bigger than the opening in the envelope.

This label is stuck on right before I go on stage. I keep them on the original wax paper they come on. I make a bunch at once and just keep them with me.

Here is how I handle it on stage. As soon as I peek the number with the peek wallet, I pick up the clipboard. The one in the picture is one I used for several shows. I do the quick math for the magic square and at the same time, I write down the original number in the window and seal the flap of the envelope. It is pretty important that you remember to use the same type of writing instrument. I use pencils. If you have a letter written in pencil and numbers in pen, obviously that will stand out like a sore thumb.

There will be a pretty woman in the audience with blond hair and blue eyes. She also thinks you are handsome. She is wearing ... and her favorite book is....

This prediction gets the best audience reactions, so save this for the end of the letter. The information I include is very specific as to hair and eye color, clothing and of course, the book is correct as well. This one is really very simple.

As people are coming in, everyone is filling out the cards with their favorite story. I get someone as they are coming in and explain what we are doing. I have her write her book and I put it in the envelope in front of her, lick it, stick it, and tell her to drop it in the bag when the theater opens.

I use a Shaxon flap, also known as a flapless envelope. If you aren't familiar with this, I will briefly explain. The envelope in the front of a stack of envelopes doesn't have a flap. You have cut it off. The envelope behind it has its flap hanging over the top, flapless envelope. You put her card into the top envelope. The second envelope is loaded with a blank card. As you turn the stack face down, you grab the flap, pulling it out. In reality you are pulling the second envelope. Now, just seal it, to keep her from getting nosy, and tell her to drop it in the bag.

Now, I immediately go back stage and look at what she wrote. I add all of the details as far as eyes and clothing to the letter. It is then folded and placed in the envelope and the envelope is sealed and I am ready to go. The only thing I have left to do is write the number on stage and flip down the adhesive label.

After reading this, everyone will tell all of their friends about the show and have a great evening, rising to their feet with thunderous applause.)

Yes, it is a bold and direct request for a standing ovation. So what? It never hurts to ask! If you don't like it, take it out, but it makes for a good ending to the show.

AFTERWORD

I hope you enjoyed what I have presented. This represents many years' worth of performance material and untold hours of thinking. Hopefully it provides some guidance on how I think and conceive of a show as well as provides some insight into how routines continue to change and evolve.

I want to say how grateful I am that you spent the money to purchase this book and that you took the time to read it. More important than your investment of money was your investment of time. Hopefully you found it a worthwhile investment.

If I can ever help, just email me at paul@paulprater.com. Here is hoping I will meet you in person soon!

