

Famous Interviews

Anthony Martin Interview

By Gary James

Ripley's Believe It or Not, declared him King of Escapists. Police officials have called him potentially dangerous, unstoppable, and unbelievable. His exploits have been covered by everyone from the Associated Press to prime time national television. His A.B.C. T.V. Special-----"Secrets of The World's Greatest Escape Artist" has been seen in over 40 countries around the world. Just who is the king of Escapists? Anthony Martin-----that's who.

Q: Did you ever see that Magic Special on the Fox Network?

A: The one where they reveal all the secrets?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. I saw it.

Q: What'd you think?

A: Magicians have been guarding an empty safe for many years. The information is out there if someone is so inclined to investigate it. If someone is interested in finding out how anything is done, the local library can supply any of that information. What I found interesting was the ratings. I don't know if you're aware of it, but, that particular magic special on Fox was their highest rated special ever! It beat Monday Night Football! So, then, one can draw conclusions from that, magic specials have always done well on television. The goal of the magician is to create this illusion where people for the moment they're watching whatever is going on, suspend their disbelief in what's happening and actually for that moment believe the person is really floating or believe the person is really being cut in half. That's what they're trying to do. But, the results of these ratings almost lead me to think that perhaps the opposite is what's actually occurring. People are actually watching the conventional magic shows on television to try to catch how it's done. "The Secrets" special getting a 15 rating speaks volumes to the fact that people want to know how it's done more than maybe want to be entertained by it. It's like a visual puzzle and I think that's maybe the way people have been looking at magic shows.

Q: Would I be correct in labeling you an Escape Artist?

A: Sure. Right off the bat, the thing we have to explain is, an Escape Artist is not a magician. People confuse the issue. Now, magicians do escape tricks, but, they're not escape artists. For instance, they substitute a real handcuff for one that looks like the real handcuff, but, it just pulls open and the audience is none the wiser. That's something I've been battling for many years. It's kind of like an uphill battle sometimes. I just continue to do what I'm doing. I'm and Escape Artist first, and a performer second. I look at it as a science. I collect handcuffs, jail locks and locks of different kinds with the explicit purpose of finding their mechanism. That to me is the real beauty in what I do, because after that we can use it to entertain people and give them that real thrill-seeking entertainment that I think people really want. A

magician will say he's cheating death, but, he's really cheating the people he's entertaining.

Q: But, if people like it...

A: Well, this is the way I see it. A magician, by the very nature of what he does, the audience knows that the woman is not really floating in the air. So, it's a given that this person is going to fool me. I go into believing it. I almost look at an escape as a prize fighter. That's not necessarily a given. Now, we're conning instead of just fooling. For instance, professional wrestling. We watch a professional wrestling match fully knowing that these things are orchestrated and sheerly for entertainment. But, if we were to find out that an Evander Holyfield, Mike Tyson fight was completely rigged and orchestrated before-hand, we would all feel cheated. That's what I'm trying to get across. When I'm locked in a box, or locked in a box lowered under the ice or in a jail, these are not orchestrated. I try to get the odds in my favor, but, anything can happen. These things are real. If I'm unable to beat the lock in a given amount of time, I'm in real trouble.

Q: Ultimately you could get yourself killed couldn't you?

A: Oh, absolutely.

Q: Are there any safeguards in place?

A: We have some safeguards in place. Some of the situations are really ambiguous. I mean when the box is shoved out of the airplane there's not too many safeguards you can build into that. The only safeguard I can build into is if I know that it will take a minute to get out of something. I will train to the point that I'm regularly getting out in 30 seconds. But then when the actual escape comes, circumstances change. Anything can happen.

Q: It occurs to me that it's a good thing you decided to pursue a career as an Escape Artist rather than a career in crime.

A: (Laughs).

Q: Can you in fact pick my lock and escape from any prison?

A: You can pick any lock and you can escape from any prison. But, it needs to be understood, you need to have a Machiavellian attitude when it comes to some of these things. I am a surreptitious escape artist. When I get out of something, it is intact. It is unmolested. It is still operable. There are locks and there are jails where that would be impossible. If I can't get to the locking mechanism, I have to do something else to get out. That would usually mean wrecking or destroying something to get at the mechanism that opens the door. So, I deliberately steer clear of that, because I'm an entertainer. I'm an Escape Artist first, but, I'm an entertainer. I can escape from virtually anything where I can get at the lock. But, if I was welded into a box, well, there you have it. That's the end of that. I deal in reality. I have to be able to get at it.

Q: What got you interested in these daredevil stunts?

A: I've always been an extreme person. It's always the most, the biggest, the extreme of whatever it is. I started out about 6 years of age doing magic and it just became disenchanting to me to find out how simple it was and it was just a wake-up call. I guess its part of growing up. You realize things aren't magical and this is the real world. But then, I became interested in escapes and I found that a person was really able to pick a lock.

Q: How do you learn something like that? That's not something you can learn in school is it?

A: No. I have a mechanical mind. I've collected locks and by drilling 'em open, figuring out

how they work, and looking at how they're made, I was just able, being mechanical to figure it out. I've developed many of my own tools to do just that and that's just kind of how it went.

Q: If you know that ultimately you could get yourself killed by doing one of those stunts, why would you do it? You don't have a Death Wish do you?

A: No. I'm a Christian. I don't believe in that or tempting God. You know Ernest Hemingway is quoted as saying "There is beauty in danger when it is deliberately sought out". I kind of think that is true. It's kind of like having the ultimate confidence. That confidence that everybody dreams about having, where you're able to up the ante to the point where everybody else has to drop out of the game. I come from a factory background, here in Wisconsin. My parents did not have a lot of money. My only alternative was to fight my way up by getting into my own thing here, and upping the ante to the point where it's now no longer a matter of who has the most money-----it's a matter of skill and skill can be learned with no money.

Q: Do you have any competition?

A: Actually, I don't. There is no one that I know of, that has divorced themselves from illusions in order to do escapes exclusively. But, I feel like I have competition in that, it almost seems like every time there's a major special on television, there's somebody doing an escape. I always feel cheated when I see it because it's always a con. I'd really like to see escape artists separated from magicians.

Q: Why are you in Sheboygan, Wisconsin? Why aren't you in Hollywood?

A: You know. I used to think that was a necessity and I think there was a time when that was. But, you know, now we can hop on an airplane and be anywhere in 3 hours. Now, we have fax machines, and I have an agent who's in California. It's like I've been there. I've done work there. I like it here. There are good, hard-working people here. They don't have any airs about themselves, and I like that. When we filmed my ice escape from under the ice, they had trouble finding people from California to film it because they didn't want to go in the cold water, under the ice. I think there's a rugged group out here.