

BEING PREPARED

by Richard Webster

About twenty-five years ago, I was taught a valuable lesson by Tony Raven, the original publisher of *Invocation* and one of the founders of the Psychic Entertainers Association. He was in New Zealand teaching graphic artists new techniques they could use with clip art. The company that had organized his visit kept him extremely busy, and mentalism was probably far from his mind when he made time to have dinner with my wife and me. We had invited another couple to join us. John was a magician with an interest in mentalism, and had subscribed to *Invocation* for many years. His wife, Linda, was — unusually, in my experience—passionate about magic.

Within minutes of meeting Tony, Linda asked him to do some magic for her. It was obvious that Tony simply wanted to relax and enjoy a pleasant evening away from his work. He politely declined, but throughout the evening Linda kept insisting that he do something. Finally, after we had finished dessert and were drinking coffee, Tony agreed.

Tony was extremely interested in Native American culture, and was wearing a necklace that contained several animal fetishes carved from stone. He removed five or six of these from the necklace and placed them in a row in front of Linda. Using equivoque, different fetishes were removed until only one remained. Tony had had one hand resting on the table throughout this procedure. He opened this hand to show it was holding the identical fetish.

It was a simple effect, but it satisfied Linda. Afterwards, I asked Tony about it. Because he was on a business trip, visiting a country where no one knew of his involvement in mentalism, he had deliberately not brought any magic with him. However, he was still prepared, because in the back of his mind he had a number of totally impromptu effects he could perform if necessary. If he hadn't been wearing this particular necklace, he would have done something else, or could have done the effect using items from the table. It would be a simple matter to secretly obtain a packet of sugar, or a teaspoon, earlier in the evening to act as the prediction.

The point was, Tony was prepared. I didn't ask him about his apparent reluctance to perform. I think it was genuine. He was tired, and was finally having an evening off. I've used apparent reluctance to perform deliberately at times, because it seems to make the effect more important in the minds of the spectators when you finally agree to do something.

If you're a mind reader, you must be able to read minds anywhere, at any time. Consequently, you need at least one, and preferably several, impromptu ways to do this. This is not always easy. One mentalist I discussed this with told me he could always perform, as he never went anywhere without billets and a pen. I asked him what he would do if he was in a swimming pool and someone asked him to do something. This has happened to me, which is why I asked the question. In fact, I'm always looking for good, impromptu effects that can be performed in a swimming pool. I may never be asked to do anything in a swimming pool again, but if I do, I'll be prepared. As a bonus, I'll also be able to perform the same effects successfully on dry land.

Think about what you can do if you're suddenly asked to perform and are totally unprepared. If you're a mind reader you can't use the magicians' excuse that you haven't brought anything with you. Ideally, you need several impromptu miracles, as what you do will depend on the situation you find yourself in.

Many years ago, I was having a quiet evening at home when a friend phoned to ask me to help him resolve a problem he was having with his sound system. As he was working only a few miles away, I raced over and helped him fix it. Someone at the function recognized me, and I was asked to do something. Because I was unshaven, and wearing old clothes, I tried to get out of it, but the audience—approximated 200 people—insisted. I did several minutes of *Psychometry from A to Z*, and everyone was happy.

That was an unusual situation, but I'd already thought about what I'd do in various situations if I were suddenly asked to do something, and was able to perform.

You might think that, if I were asked to do something in a small group, I'd immediately choose to read someone's palm. I might choose palmistry if it were a one-on-one situation, but I've discovered that if I do one palm reading in a group, everyone else in that group—plus almost everyone in the room who may happen to see it—will want one, too. That might be fine, depending on the situation. Some years ago, I visited my older son at his work, and he asked me to do a reading for his secretary. Inevitably, I ended up doing about a dozen readings. I didn't mind that, as the people in his office are still talking about it, and my son is making the most of the reflected glory. However, I seldom feel like doing twenty free readings in a row.

I have several impromptu effects that I can do anywhere. Some of these involve minimal props, such as paper, pen, or a pendulum. I have others that need nothing, whatsoever. They are the ones that pass my swimming pool test.

What can you do? Think along the lines of equivoque, the PATEO force, psychological effects, contact mindreading, and genuine mindreading (yes, the real thing).

Oh, yes ... what did I do in the swimming pool? More than thirty years ago, I worked as a sales rep for a company that sold printing machines. One year, the printing industry held its annual, midwinter convention at a thermal resort. Not surprisingly, we spent most of our spare time chatting, drinking, and bobbing up and down in a large outdoor thermal pool. In this environment, I was asked to do something. My boss was there, as were almost all of our most important customers and their wives and partners. All our competitors were there, too. I asked the CEOs of our six biggest customers to stand in a row in the middle of the pool facing me. I asked their wives to stand in a row behind me. A volunteer was chosen. She closed her eyes while I asked the six wives to silently indicate which one of them would be the target. Using equivoque, my volunteer managed to find the correct husband for the target wife. A year or two ago, one of the people who had been in the pool at the time reminded me of it, so it's still remembered.

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