

Lady Houdini Defies Death in Breathtaking Escape Act

World premier female escape artist Kristen Johnson, aka Lady Houdini, defied death for the 2,950th time at the New York State Fair on Sunday afternoon.

The audience cheered as she hung 30 feet in the air by her feet while escaping a straitjacket.

They were awed after she maneuvered a suit jacket underneath layers of tightly tied knots around her body in less than 12 seconds.



Ginny Hudson and her niece Kaydence come to the fair yearly, but they had never seen anything like Lady Houdini's performance before.

“I thought the most exciting part was when she was hanging up on the rope,” Kaydence stated. “I thought she was going to fall.”

Johnson’s final escape in this act brought a less-exciting and more terrifying energy, as the alluring water tank on stage taunted audience members throughout her performance. While most escape artists that attempt the fittingly-named “water torture cell” do so behind the barrier of a curtain, Lady Houdini’s authentic act can be seen from every angle.

Her husband and host of the show, Kevin Ridgeway, challenges the audience, offering a \$10,000 reward to anyone who can prove that Lady Houdini takes a second breath of air once her head drops below the water, that she uses an underwater breathing device, or that she uses a key of any kind. Anyone who thought the stunt was an elaborate sleight of hand became as anxiety-ridden as the rest of us.

Lady Houdini sat on the edge of the tank with chains around her body and police-grade handcuffs around her ankles and wrists. The audience was silent and still as she took her last breath. Once she went under the water, Ridgeway put on the tank’s lid with the help of an audience member, securing it with three high-security American padlocks.

Though Johnson can hold her breath for five minutes and two seconds, watching her pick these locks felt like an eternity. Ridgeway intermittently tapped on the glass to signal Johnson, who nodded her head “yes” each time.

“We have signals between us,” Ridgeway said after the show. “It’s more me checking her cognitive states mentally because if you start getting low on oxygen, you’ll eventually lose consciousness. You start losing what’s going on, where you are, what’s happening around you, and you start getting tunnel vision. So it’s my way to double-check that she’s still there.”

However, during her last 30 seconds underwater, Ridgeway looked visibly worried and audibly spoke his thoughts into the microphone, repeating, “Come on.” When she finally broke through the last lock and rocketed out of the water, the audience took a collective sigh of relief and erupted in praise.



This performance is an incredibly rare feat, especially as skillfully executed by a woman escape artist in a male-dominated field. However, Johnson embraces this.

“I had a lot of people say ‘you can’t do that,’” Johnson stated after the show. “If you tell me I can’t do something... watch me.”

One of the merchandise items that Johnson sells is a pink shirt with the quote, “I refuse to accept that anything is off limits to me just because I’m female.” Ginny, who attended with her niece, bought the shirt before the show, inspired by the powerful message.

“I think it’s just an inspiration for everyone that even though they always say ‘men are the only ones that have done it’ it doesn’t mean that just because you’re female that you aren’t able to do it or that you can’t excel at it,” Ginny said.