



NUGGET

Bro. Harry Houdini

Summary: Houdini, his life and Masonic Career.

Houdini, or more properly Ehrich Weiss, was born in Budapest on March 24th 1874, but emigrated to Wisconsin when he was four years old. His father was a Rabbi, named Mayer Samuel Weiss and his mother was Cecilia Steiner Weiss. The family was quite poor, so most of the seven children began to work at an early age to support the family.

At the age of eight Ehrich sold newspapers and worked as a shoeshine boy. At the age of twelve he left home to find work, then finally joined his father in New York City. It was here that he had his introduction to the world of magic. Houdini began to perform magic as a teenager calling himself 'Eric the Great'. It was at this time that he read the autobiography of one of the greatest magicians of the day, the memoirs of Jean Eugene Robert Houdin, a Frenchman. He was so impressed that he took his name, adding the letter 'i' to become Houdini.

On 22nd June 1894, Houdini married Wilhelmina Beatrice Rahner (known as Bess), who was a Catholic. This union, which naturally caused distress and friction in his Jewish family, was destined to be a most happy relationship.

Through exercise and balanced living, Houdini developed his physical state to an amazing degree of fitness with muscles of steel and a mind to match. As an outstanding swimmer he also developed an extended underwater breath control technique that proved essential, when he became an 'escape artist'. He spent years learning the mechanics of locks and handcuffs and became a master at opening secure devices of every kind. He also brought charisma and sheer magnetism to his presentations, mesmerising his audiences until they believed in his apparent miracles. The publicity that he created to enhance his image, together with his extravagant methods of presentation was outstanding. He began to offer rewards to anyone who could successfully restrain him, first in handcuffs, and later in all manner of objects: leg irons, straightjackets, jails, prison cells, a mail pouch,



Harry Houdini c. 1905

packing crates, an iron boiler, and coffins. The most famous being the water torture cell, in which, locked & shackled, he was lowered head-first into a water filled chamber. The audience sat transfixed, watching him through the glass front, knowing that unless escape was possible within precious minutes, certain death by drowning would result. Houdini was without doubt the most famous magician and escapologist in history. Eventually he was elected as President of the *Society of American Magicians* in 1917.

Mr Enrich Weiss (Houdini) was Initiated into St. Cecile Lodge No. 568 (The vaudeville and entertainers Lodge, named after the French Patron Saint of Music) in New York City on 17th July, 1923 at the age of 49.

He was Passed and Raised later that year and in 1924 entered The Consistory, one of the higher degrees. In December that same year, he became a Shriner in New York's Mecca Temple.

He was immensely proud of his Masonic membership, and gave a benefit performance for the Valley of New York filling a Scottish Rite Cathedral with 4000 seats and raising thousands of dollars for needy Brethren.

On October 22nd 1926, during an engagement at The Princess Theatre in Montreal, a college student asked permission to test his famous abdominal muscle control, by striking him as part of his act. Houdini accepted the challenge, whereupon the student struck before he had time to tense his muscles; a critical requirement. Houdini ignored later stomach pains in the tradition of 'the Show must go on', but on arriving at Detroit the next day, he was diagnosed with acute appendicitis. Again he insisted upon performing. Finally, with a temperature of 104°F he was taken to Grace Hospital, where a ruptured and gangrenous appendix was removed, but by then Peritonitis had set in. On the afternoon of 31st October 1926 (Halloween), he passed to the Grand Lodge above aged 52.

Bibliography

Harper, Paul, Famous Freemasons - A Prologue, <https://solomon.ugle.org.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=2084>



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Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.

Themed with the meeting or activity.

Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.

Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.

Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version unless otherwise specified.

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