

CHICAGO TRIBUNE QUALITIES OF LIFE: THE GUY PAGE ODD JOBS

MAKING A LIFE OUT OF A WHIP

William Hageman - Published June 5, 2005

It may take some time before whip-cracking achieves the cultural status of, say, Paula Abdul.

But its popularity is definitely on the upswing, Chris Camp says.

He's "The Whip Guy," and for most of his 36 years has been cracking a bullwhip, first for friends and family and now for audiences around the country. He does 125 to 150 shows a year and recently set a world record for whip cracks in 60 seconds—the Guinness folks are processing it now—with 222.

There are events for whip enthusiasts all around the country, Camp (www.thewhipguy.com) explained, with lessons, demonstrations and vendors (a good bullwhip will set you back only a couple of hundred bucks). Even Hollywood is doing its part, with whip scenes in Antonio Banderas' "Zorro" films and Michelle Pfeiffer's Catwoman character in "Batman Returns." And don't forget the exploits of Camp's hero.

"Indiana Jones," said the Springfield resident. "I was 12 when 'Indiana Jones' came out. I didn't have any desire to see that movie, but my mom took me. And I came out and wanted a bullwhip."

Soon he got his first one, a 6-footer, for \$2 from a stockyard. The rest was a snap.

He polished his technique in his yard ("what every neighborhood wants, a kid with a noisemaker"). When his buddies declined to hold targets—the wimps—he placed his 12-inch "Star Wars" action figures on a fence and picked them off. Soon he graduated to 3-inch figurines. By the time he got to college, he was doing whip tricks at bars between sets by his band. It was still a sideline when he started a graphic-design business 10 years ago but has grown into a full-time gig. Library performances, festivals, schools, corporate events, parties . . . the Whip Guy does them all, combining showmanship, history and even a physics lesson.

"Once people see the show, any negative stereotype that's associated with whip—we're all adults here, and we know what he means—goes out the window," he said.

"I'm just trying to rejuvenate the whip for the public."

CRRRRRACK!

Stacie Freudenberg - Chronicle staff

"What you're hearing is the first manmade tool capable of making a sonic boom," said entertainer Chris Camp, brandishing a leather bullwhip to a group of awed children and parents.

As part of the St. Charles Reads program, the St. Charles Library brought Camp, a whip expert, to entertain children on Saturday. Camp was chosen to illustrate the municipal book club's current pick, the pioneer novel "Peace Like a River," by Lief Enger.

Michelle Eageny, 7, said she was scared of "getting kind of hit around the legs" when she volunteered to assist Camp. With a loud crack, Camp snared her with the whip. She did not have a scratch on her.

Using several of his 24 American bullwhips and Australian stock whips, Camp snapped targets out of the hands and mouths of child volunteers and out of his own hands and mouth. One trick involved him snapping a target that he held in the same hand as the whip.

Other tricks involved fast-cracking one or two whips to percussive beats more fitting a Buddy Rich drum solo than a whip show.

"I like rhythm," he said.

Camp, 35, first began playing with whips when he was 12.

"I started when I was 12 because I saw Indiana Jones when I was 11," he said.

Camp became obsessed with the globe-trotting, whip-cracking archeologist, begging his parents for a whip. A year after he first saw the movie, he and his parents were visiting a stockyard in his native Springfield. A vendor was selling whips for \$2. Camp's father bought him two.

Camp said he trained himself by repeatedly watching a video of "Raiders of the Lost Ark," rewinding to study the whip stunts. He said would turn his record player speakers to the window so he could practice outside while the movie's soundtrack blasted from his room.

"My parents know that movie inside and out," he said. "They probably dream about it."

He said he also learned from a book by David Morgan, a whip expert who made the whips used in the Indiana Jones trilogy.

He started doing shows five or six years ago, doing three or four shows a year. A graphic designer by trade, Camp currently does about 175 shows a year and is trying to turn whip-cracking into a full-time profession.

Last year, he entered the Guinness Book of Records for most whip cracks in one minute. He cracked the whip 212 times, beating the old record of 203.



Jenna Jezek, left, 8, reacts to being whipped by Bullwhip Master Chris Camp Saturday at the Batavia Public Library. Camp talked to kids and adults about how bullwhips used to be used and demonstrated some precision tricks.

At the 2004 Wild West Arts Club show, he won first place for style and technique in the one whip category. He also was named Best New Whip Cracker of the Year and won the Lightning Whip Contest, with 11 cracks in three seconds.

Despite Camp's record, 12-year-old Cole Tuttle still was scared when Camp snapped two pieces of Styrofoam from his hands.

"It's an intention that you don't want to get hit by a bullwhip going 900 miles an hour," Tuttle said. ■

MASTER WHIPS UP FUN

By David Sharos Daily Herald Correspondent

Posted 2/6/2005

A crackling flourish brought a weeklong celebration of the romantic days of the Wild West to a close Saturday at the St. Charles Library.

Bullwhip master Chris Camp shared a history of the practice and a snapping exhibition of his self-taught skills.

"These seats are loud, these are really loud, and these ones here are really, really loud," Camp warned his audience about the seats closest to where he was going to crack the whip.

"Can somebody tell me where you've seen whips used in movies before?" Camp said.

Recent films including "The Mask of Zorro," "Catwoman" and even "The Passion of the Christ" all have employed whips, but the Springfield resident said his interest in the bullwhip began a little earlier.

"I got into this initially because of the 'Indiana Jones' movies," Camp said. "I actually started playing with whips when I was 12, but I didn't get serious about this until about five years ago when I started doing this professionally."

Camp now performs about 175 shows a year.

"Whips have been used as a sign of power and also for corporal punishment," Camp said. "In terms of moving cattle, they were developed because you wanted to move the head bull and if you used a stick, you could damage the meat you were hoping to sell at the market, plus you had to get too close to the animal.

"The sound of the whip was enough to move the animal in the direction you wanted him to go without touching him."

The morning show attracted more than two dozen spectators.

"I was a fan of Lash La Rue when I was a kid, and he was a guy who wore all black and had a bullwhip and a pistol," said John Poole of St. Charles. "I always enjoyed seeing him crack the bad guys, and so I wanted to see a bullwhip demonstration."

Zack Thompson, 8, came with his mother, Denise, who said her son had seen whips used in movies and thought he would enjoy the demonstration.

"I think Zack thinks whips are kind of cool," she said. "I think he kind of knows what they were used for." ■

GET CRACKIN'

'THE WHIP GUY' WHIPS UP A GUINNESS WORLD RECORD AT FAIR

By NICK ROGERS

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT WRITER — SPRINGFIELD STATE JOURNAL REGISTER — AUGUST 22, 2004

Chris Camp cracks out musical patterns with his whips as part of his show in Conservation World at the Illinois State Fair.

His audience had to forgive him if the tempos were a little slower than usual Saturday afternoon.

"After all, I did just beat my own world record and my arms are still kind of tired," Camp told a crowd of at least 100 people.

They cheered after bearing witness to Camp's breaking the Guinness world record for whip cracks in one minute. He inherited the honor with 212 cracks.

With a count of 209, Camp actually broke the old record of 203 on his first attempt at 2 p.m. Saturday. A second attempt at 2:30 p.m. came in at one less than the record at 202. And his improvement on his own record by three cracks came with his final attempt about 4:15 p.m.

When Marty Mueller, Camp's official crack clicker, yelled out "209!" after his first attempt, Camp let out a loud whoop. His wife, Laura, who was running one of the video cameras for verification, also let out a cheer, and his 6-year-old son, Benjamin, and 4-year-old daughter, Lillian, ran up to him and hugged his legs. Camp's 2-year-old daughter, Gabrielle, watched from her stroller.

"What do you think of that?" Camp yelled to his mother, Carole, to whom he gave a congratulatory kiss afterward. Along with many other family members, Camp's father, Jim, was on hand running the other video camera for evidentiary footage to send to Guinness.

As "The Whip Guy," the Springfield resident performs to more than 100 audiences annually with his show of tricks and techniques. On Saturday, he realized his dream of almost a year.

Camp keeps in touch regularly via e-mail with Robert Dante, the former record-holder and a whip-cracking instructor at the Minneapolis Bullwhip Academy. Last September, Dante wrote Camp that he knew of no one trying to beat the record he had most recently set.

"That was the impetus," Camp said. "I got the Guinness specs from there and had new whips made. He has no idea I'm even doing this, as far as I know."

The two new whips Camp ordered were made by Joe Strain, a whip maker in Washington who has made whips for movies such as "Catwoman" and the upcoming "Zorro" sequel. Each one had to fit Guinness' exact measurement requirement, and rules state the person checking the measurements must be as close to a professional in the same field as one can get.



"There aren't many whip crackers around, so I got an engineer," Camp said of Mueller, a professional engineer from Chicago whom Camp knows through Mueller's sister.

"I haven't done anything like this before," Mueller said. "But I was really looking forward to him doing it. He really wanted to set the bar."

Camp's technique was to double-time the pace of a metronome ticking at 120 beats per minute for an ideal crack count of 240. He used the metronome to get him started on the rhythm and had those manning the stopwatch call out at 10-second intervals.

"Once I hit 30 seconds, I thought 'This is pretty peachy,'" Camp said of his first try. "But then my arms started to fatigue and I lost my concentration. I wasn't sure I had it. I thought I was pretty darn close. I was doing more jerking than pushing and pulling there toward the end."

Camp knows Dante is planning to break the record again next month with a projected crack count of 220 to 224. Should Dante hit that mark, Camp knows he will have to work on his endurance to retake the record.

"I hope he likes some healthy competition because I'm eager to beat it again if I have to," Camp said. "It feels great to test that unknown barrier. You just never know." ■

PRESS RELEASES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE — AUGUST 21, 2004

USAC RACES AND NEW RECORD FOR GUINNESS BOOK HIGHLIGHT OF CONSERVATION DAY AT THE ILLINOIS STATE FAIR

SPRINGFIELD, Ill.- It was a big day for one part of the fair, as lumberjacks raced up standing tree logs, Purina's Incredible dog team caught Frisbees flying through the air, and fairgoers enjoyed shows in the new amphitheatre of Conservation World at the Illinois State Fair. Yet the real highlight of the day was local Springfield man, Chris Camp, a world class whip cracker, who set a new world record for the Guinness Book of World Records snapping his bull whip 212 times in a minute, breaking the former record of 203 at Conservation World on Saturday at the Illinois State Fair.

Chris Camp, know as just the "whip guy," managed to snap his bullwhip 212 times, taking a short breather after about 45 seconds of snapping to regain his strength. He returned to snap another 20 times before time was called. The 212 snaps, which still must be verified by the Guinness Book of World Record's officials, was Chris Camps third attempt of the day. In his first attempt, early in the afternoon, he broke the record with 209 snaps. He later followed with a 202 snap performance.

"The action of the bullwhip snap, which is faster than most bullets out of a gun, can cut flesh and break bones. Traveling between 750 and 900 miles an hour, the bullwhip creates a miniature sonic boom. This sonic boom is the first man-made one of its kind," Chris Camp said to a crowd of curious fairgoers.

Rules for the Guinness Book of Records are stringent, in order for his performance to be accepted, he had to use a specific type of bull whip with diameters of a certain size, shape, and length. Furthermore, a judge had to count the snaps as well have it recorded to verify the performance took place. Joe Strain, who custom designed the whips, helped him with the first requirement, designing his whips to meet the exact specifications of Guinness and making the whips wider and faster.

Chris said that he practiced to break the record by using long rubber stretch bands attached to his door to increase his endurance and a target stand to increase his accuracy in where he snaps his whip.

The accuracy was key for Chris, as all of his crowd volunteers were young children. One of his most exciting tricks and somewhat nerve-racking for parents involved placing children with their backs turned and hands out on the set. The children would hold styrofoam sticks out to their side. He would then take a long bullwhip and snap the sticks in half as the children held the sticks out to the crowd's surprise. Fairgoers can see a show by the "Whip Guy" tomorrow Sunday, Aug. 22 daily from 10 a.m.- 7 p.m. in Conservation World.



At the racetrack, Brian Tyler took the checkered flag with his #2 car at the USAC Tony Bettenhausen 100 Saturday at the Illinois State Fair. Rick Tobias Jr. in car #17 took second. For the fourth consecutive year, Jerry Coons Jr. in car #191 finished in the top three.

The fairgrounds will host the ARCA Allen Crowe Memorial and Wynn Sportsman Nationals Sunday, Aug. 22. Tickets are still available and can be purchased by calling the Illinois State Fair ticket office at (217) 782-1979 or Ticketmaster at (800) 827-8927

The USAC races drew a crowd of 2,561 to Grandstand Saturday afternoon. The evening event in the Grandstand featured Michael McDonald who teamed up with Daryl Hall & John Oats with special guest Average White Band performing to an audience of 3,169. The Extreme Monster Truck Nationals drew a crowd of 518 earlier in the day followed by an audience of 501 in the evening. The Multi-Purpose Arena will showcase the finals of the Extreme Monster Truck National at 2 p.m. tomorrow. The last night at the fair will feature a free performance by the Illinois Symphony Orchestra at 7:30 p.m. in the Grandstand. ■

ENTERTAINER WOWS FANS WITH WHIP TRICKERY

DANIEL J. GRANT

AGRINEWS — SATURDAY, AUGUST 28, 2004

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — Spectators at the Illinois State Fair may have heard an unusual snap in the air this year, which sort of sounded like the discharge of a cap gun.

If so, most weren't as much startled as they were awestruck once they viewed the source. Chris Camp, otherwise known as the 'whip guy,' demonstrated his unique talent with various whips on the fairgrounds throughout the 2004 fair.

Camp, of Springfield, can perform a variety of tricks from the powerful slicing of fruit and the precision of cutting a stick dangling from a daring volunteer's mouth, to the finesse of delicately wrapping the end of a whip around a person's finger.

"I do really cool target work," said Camp, who uses various whips in his show that range in length up to 12 feet. "My shows also have a lot of education in them."

For example, Camp said most people think the American bull whip was a tool of the pioneers. However, in actuality, Camp said the American version of the bull whip was only introduced around the turn of the last century - the Australian version is about twice as old.

Additionally, he talked about the physics involved in the skill, which produces a sound-barrier-breaking crack.

"The end of the whip - the smaller the coil gets, the faster it goes," he said. "By the end, it reaches speeds of 750 to 900 mph."

Unlike other skills that are passed on from previous generations or taught in a class, Camp said he is basically self taught, - picking up a few things from various movies and television shows.

In fact, Camp's whole interest in the whip originated from his boyhood when he first caught site of Harrison Ford's now legendary character, Indiana Jones.

"I saw that movie when I was 11-years-old and I got my first whip later for \$2," Camp said.

Today, he has honed his skill enough that performing is becoming a full-time job. He said that, from about mid-June to his first appearance at the State Fair, he had already performed more than 80 shows. Camp performs everywhere, from corporate events to school functions.

"It's a thing people don't see that often," he said. "Although, it's starting to be seen in more movies (like 'Zoro' and 'Cat Woman'), which is good for me because it's becoming more mainstream."

Camp added that all his whips are made from kangaroo leather because it's the strongest leather in the world for its weight and size. He even owns a whip made by long-time producer David Morgan, who Camp said has also made a whip for the actual Indiana Jones.

Camp is currently going for a Guinness Book of World Records distinction for most whip cracks in a minute. His ultimate goal is to reach a record 240, or four per second. ■

HE'S A CRACKERJACK WHIP CRACKER

By Joe Holleman Of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch
07/13/2004

WATCHING CHRIS CAMP WORK - AND SITTING CLOSE TO THE "ZWIP-POP" CREATED BY HIS BULLWHIP - MAKES YOU WANT TO ACT LIKE A MOTHER: "YOU'LL PUT YOUR EYE OUT."

But when Camp was growing up in Springfield, Ill., his mother was cool enough to let him play with bullwhips. And now he is a world-class whip-cracker.

In March, Camp won three gold medals in the whip-cracking competition at the annual Wild West Arts Club convention in Las Vegas and was named "Best New Whip Cracker of the Year."

And this summer, Camp, 35, is performing at numerous St. Louis area public libraries.

"I got interested in this, pure and simple, from seeing 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' when I was a kid," Camp explains. "I mean, I thought Indiana Jones was the coolest, and I loved his bullwhip stuff."

So, his parents let him buy two old bullwhips at a Springfield stockyard, for \$2 each. "I think they thought it was a passing fad; it was only costing them four bucks; and in a couple of months, I'd move on to something else," he says.

He started first by knocking his G.I. Joes off of a fence post, then he aimed at soda cans and then finally his three-inch "Star Wars" figurines.

"Then I started asking my friends to come over and hold them in their hands," Camp recalls. "Funny, but they had to clean their room every single day of the week."

But Camp stayed with his hobby, through high school and through Millikin College in Decatur, Ill., where he earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts. Camp also runs Duo Design, a graphic design company, from the home he shares with his wife, Laura, and their three young children. He also is a fine arts instructor at Robert Morris College in Springfield.

Whip-cracking remained simply a hobby until about five years ago, when he started getting paid for his appearances at county fairs and Western shows.

"The whip allows me to fulfill some of my personal needs. It allows me to entertain, to teach, to be creative and to make some money," he says.

Camp keeps in shape during the winter months by practicing for several hours a day, several days a week at the Springfield YMCA. His favorite training exercise is seeing how long he can keep a balloon afloat by cracking it with a whip. He often does this workout with a whip in each hand.

During a recent show at the Weber Branch Library in south St. Louis County, two things were very clear: First, whips are very loud when they crack. Second, whips are very, very scary when they crack anywhere near your body - scary enough to send young boys scurrying out of the front row of the meeting room to the safety of seats in the back.

The question on the kids' minds? What makes the whip crack?

"The whip crack is the first, man-made sonic boom," Camp says. "The 'cracker' (a small, piece of nylon connected to the end of the whip) is moving at 750 to 900 miles an hour. And it's a little sonic boom when it reaches that speed."

Bobby George of south St. Louis County stood in the middle of that sonic boom as Camp performed one trick: He cracked the whip as it wrapped around Bobby's waist. Bobby, who is 7 years old, never lost his frozen, nervous smile for the rest of the show.

The trip to Las Vegas was momentous, Camp says, because he found out that, well, he's pretty darned good.

"Honestly, I had no plans to compete. I went out to learn things and watch other people - like Vince Bruce and Alex Green, who did a lot of the whip work in the 'Indiana Jones' movies and in 'Zorro.' "

But Camp ended up winning the single-whip technique competition and then the lightning whip contest, which Camp won by cracking a whip 11 times in three seconds. Yes, in three seconds.

Camp now is waiting for a special six-foot whip to be made so he can make the Guinness Book of World Records.

"The record for whip cracks in one minute is 203," he explains. "I can crack a whip 120 times in 30 seconds, so I'm working on my arm strength to do it for a full minute. My goal is to do 220 in a minute."

Marilyn Lane, a library assistant at Weber, was mightily impressed by the whip show.

"I've never seen anything like this," Lane says. "We've had pup-peteers and magicians at the library, but this is completely different. It's amazing." ■

WHOLESOME VAUDEVILLE LIVES (HAVE YOU CHECKED IT OUT?)

(Joe Gandelman)

They often say vaudeville died and while the massive theaters that featured 12 hour shows (with a rotten act put on last to clear the audience out) may have vanished due to the advent of radio and motion pictures sound — wholesome, family-friendly vaudeville is alive and well.

And probably with a few minutes driving distance of you.

HERE'S ONE PART OF IT, FROM A CHICAGO TRIBUNE PIECE:

The Catskills have comedians, Las Vegas has showgirls, but the Glenview Public Library has the Whip Guy.

In a meeting room a few steps from the volumes of Dr. Seuss and Richard Scarry, entertainer Chris Camp mesmerized a crowd of children one recent afternoon as he used a 6-foot bullwhip to flick straws from the hands and mouths of young volunteers.

It was his 70th gig this summer at a public library, venues that account for a growing part of his schedule.

"I think there is a demand for things that are a little less ordinary," said Camp, 35. "It opens up a new door, maybe even to people who haven't been to libraries before."

The normally hushed precincts of public libraries have become a new vaudeville for comedians, dog trainers and bucket-pounding musicians, as administrators book sometimes-raucous acts to draw children's summertime attention toward the written word.

I do LOTS of libraries here in Southern California in my non-blogging incarnation. The shows get huge crowds — sometimes whole families.

To many kids, its one of the few experiences they get these days to see a live performance — but there is competition for time out there:

"Our competition is the video games, the television, movies. ... What [the performers] do is unique. It's entertainment that's different, that attracts children," said Ruth Faklis of Burbank's Prairie Trails Public Library. It ended its summer reading program last month with a show by CircusBoy, a comedian who juggled knives, balanced atop a ladder and wheeled around on a tiny bicycle.

Libraries have long hired performers to entice children and their parents into stopping by during the summer. But some say traditional acts—such as guitar-strumming folk singers or Mark Twain-channeling actors—are increasingly being supplanted by shows that seem better suited to a nightclub or boardwalk.

The Bucket Boys, two percussionists who bang on everything from stop signs to brake drums for their "Stomp"-like routine, played a

library a day during one week in July. Vince Romanelli, 22, said he is eternally amazed that librarians don't mind the racket.

Animal acts are big too. The Library Administrators Conference of Northern Illinois, which keeps a catalog of frequent performers, lists creature features from "Tami's Turtles" to "Ed and Annette's Monkeys & More."

Some libraries restrict performances to children enrolled in their summer reading programs, hoping the promise of entertainment will persuade kids to pick up books. Schaumburg doesn't follow that policy, but some who came to watch Popeye and Sweet Pea said the shows nonetheless motivate them to hit the stacks.

But you don't only see it in libraries. You see family and kid-friendly (we're not talking about Barney by the way) acts in other venues, too...it's just they're off the mass media radar screen. You see them in:

-FAIRS: There is in effect a "fair circuit" where performers, after getting established, go from fair to fair, "routing" themselves. Some travel and sleep in RVs which are parked in fair-provided parking. Other stay in hotels. They often drive long distances from fair to fair to do their "gigs." Performers get their jobs by mailing or going to fair conventions where they can mix with and audition for fair officials.

-SCHOOL FAMILY NIGHTS: These also rotate family acts for "family nights."

-TELEMARKETED VAUDEVILLE SHOWS: Several performers on the bill. Close to the old Ed Sullivan Show format (which was vaudeville). Money raised going to a group.

-MALLS: They are looking for fast paced programs that draw in at least the kids and their mothers, if not the whole family, in Kids Clubs (parents usually get discount coupons if they sign up for the club).

-CHURCHES: Some churches do special vaudeville nights. I just tonight saw a production at the Pacific Church of Religious Science — basically a musical that actually was a slick vaudeville show, produced and performed by talented church members.

So the family friend live entertainment is indeed out there. You have a whole new generation that shows they want it — and young entertainers who want to do it. It's available to you a minimum cost. Have you checked it out (and therefore supported and strengthened it) yet as American heads into the 21st Century?

SKILL AT THE FLIP OF A SWITCH

FILM-INSPIRED FAN WHIPS UP A STORM FOR MID-MISSOURI HERITAGE.

JENNIFER MYERS

MISSOURIAN, COLUMBIA, MISSOURI — SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2004



Chris Camp ushers a nervous Natalie Quade, 9, to center stage at the Heritage Festival, where he will show off his skills with a whip by wrapping it around her torso. (JACQUELINE LYDIE KAZIL/Missourian)

INDIANA JONES HAS NOTHING ON CHRIS CAMP.

The whip cracker and entertainer from Springfield, Ill., has 20 years of experience and three awards under his ammunition-studded belt. At the Heritage Festival on Saturday, Camp entertained the crowd with his speed and precision tricks while educating them in the history of whips and whip cracking.

It was the whip-wielding, treasure-seeking hero of pop-culture fame who inspired Camp to enter the world of whip cracking in the first place.

Camp was 11 when he went with his mother to see "Raiders of the Lost Ark." For months after seeing the movie, he pestered his parents for a whip of his own. When the family ran across a cardboard box filled with old whips for \$2 each at a stockyard, his parents caved in and bought two.

"They figured I'd either play with them for a week and be done with the fad or beat myself to death," Camp said. "Either way, they figured it was \$4 well spent."

As he performed tricks of speed and precision Saturday for a crowd at the Heritage Festival, which continues from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. today at Nifong Park, Camp recalled how he taught himself to crack the whip through trial and error. He thought, like most novices, that swinging the whip in wide circles over his head was the key to getting a nice, loud crack.

"After about a week of doing this," Camp said as he demonstrated swinging the whip in circles until he caught himself in it, "I convinced my parents to rent the movie."

And movie-watching, along with a little reading and a lot of trial and error, was the main source of Camp's early instruction. Luckily he grew up in a rural area, so after seeing a stunt in a movie he would head to the spacious backyard to practice. He learned the three basic movements in whip cracking — the cattlemen's crack, the circus crack, and the overhead or flick — from a book by David Morgan, whom he describes as the "granddaddy" of whip cracking.

"David Morgan made the whips for the Indiana Jones movie," Camp said. "And he's made many of the whips I now use."

With this basic knowledge in hand, Camp started to see the whip as an extension of his arm. He set up targets in the backyard and practiced hitting them as he imagined he was saving the world from bad guys.

"I pretended I was Indiana Jones or Black Bart," Camp said. "My targets were my 12-inch 'Star Wars' figurines and my G.I. Joes."

As Camp's skill increased, the targets decreased in size. Camp entertained the crowd by joking that none of his friends would come over to play after he asked them to hold the figures in their hands so he could practice. As he told the story, he proved he was capable of such a feat by whipping in half a target held in his nephew's fingertips.

Precision is not the only skill needed to be an international whip cracking champion, Camp said. He showcased his speed while announcing he recently bested the record for number of cracks in 60 seconds. The results are still being verified by the Guinness Book of World Records, but Camp is confident he will soon hold the world record for attaining 212 cracks in 60 seconds. His ultimate goal for speed is 240 to 245 cracks in a minute, which would require maintaining a four cracks-per-second average.

Throughout the summer, Camp does two or three shows per day, four days per week at festivals and events around the Midwest. Sometimes, such as this weekend, his wife and three children travel with him. He does tricks with his 2-, 4-, and 6-year-olds and enjoys having them participate in shows. His wife, Laura, said she feels comfortable having the children perform with him now, but at first had no idea what she had gotten herself into.

"I thought I was marrying a mild-mannered graphic designer with a little craziness about Indiana Jones," she said.

Camp is still a part-time graphic designer and teacher, and he still has a soft spot for Indiana Jones. When asked how many times he's seen "Raiders of the Lost Ark," Camp looked down and shook his head.

"It's shameful," he said. "Hundreds and hundreds of times in the last 20 years." ■

YOUNG O'FALLON READERS WHIPPED INTO SHAPE

Tiffany Garner
Of the Suburban Journals

Children covered their ears and jolted as they heard the sounds of a whip cracking at the O'Fallon Public Library on Tuesday.

No, none of the children were being punished for overdue library books. They were watching Chris Camp, a professional bullwhip, as he demonstrated some talented tricks. He also had interesting tidbits of whip information to share with the children gathered during the library's reading program.

"This is an American-style bullwhip," he said, as he swung the whip around, making a loud crack. "This isn't meant to strike anything, it's meant to make a noise."

Camp explained that the whip flies through the air around 900 m.p.h. and the noise heard is actually the first manmade sonic boom because the whip breaks the speed of sound.

Camp said the whip he was using was primarily for herding. He had the children moo like cows as they reenacted a herding.

"This whip would scare the lead cow and he would move and the other cows would follow him," Camp said. "None of the cows were hit."

Camp, who gained interest in whips at the age of 11 after seeing an Indiana Jones movie, got his first whip by age 12.

"I thought Indiana Jones was the coolest movie ever," Camp said. "I got my first whip and I would swing it around, not knowing how to actually use it. And basically I beat myself to death. It wasn't that easy."

Camp asked the crowd if they liked danger and they shouted "yes." Except for one young boy who replied, "I love danger."

The boy was asked to help Camp with his next trick. Johnathan Beebe, 8, of O'Fallon stood still with his hands straight up in the air as a whip was cracked around his body.

Camp then asked 11-year old Michelle Hardy to be his next volunteer. As he placed two sticks of Styrofoam in her hands, she told him, "Don't break my nails." He then whipped the sticks, cutting them in half without breaking any of her nails.

Camp, who practices up to three hours a day, told the children how reading books helped him learn about whips.

"It's a skill where you really have to focus and practice a lot to get good," Camp said. ■

Email: tgarner@yourjournal.com

WHIP IT

By NICK ROGERS
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT WRITER
— SPRINGFIELD STATE JOURNAL REGISTER

Soaking in all the Indiana Jones memorabilia in Chris Camp's home, it's hard to believe he once thought "Raiders of the Lost Ark" looked corny.

"I didn't really want to go," Camp says of the classic character's film debut. "But my mom took me anyway, and it turned out to be one of the greatest movies ever made."

Indy's nimble whip wielding inspired Camp, and back in 1981, a leather shoestring inserted into a hollowed-out dowel rod was an OK start.

Two decades and a full Indiana Jones costume (down to the infamous "idol") later, Camp has turned the fantasy of many a boy's childhood into reality.

As either Indy or a cowboy, Camp entralls more than 100 audiences each year with his whip-cracking techniques and tricks. He creates musical rhythm patterns with double-whip "volley" and "inter-twine" cracks, pops heads off roses with a flick of the wrist and snaps Styrofoam sticks off his head William Tell-style, piece-by-piece until they disintegrate.

Camp, 35, has performed at corporate events, the Illinois State Fair and libraries. No matter the venue, his goal is catering to children who've never heard of Indiana Jones and adults remembering the days when a whip was standard issue for their own heroes, Lash LaRue or Zorro.

"The little kids still love the noise and the action of it, especially if I'm playing some music behind me," Camp says. "I try to get across the amazement that this is something that can destroy, but also be so delicate as to blow out a candle or wrap around someone's finger. The interest is out there. Whenever I do kids' shows, the parents always ask me where they can get whips."

In Las Vegas earlier this month, Camp earned three top prizes at the international convention for the Wild West Arts Club, which promotes old-time talents like gun spinning and knife throwing.

He took first place in Single-Whip Style and Technique and the Lightning Whip competitions, snapping 11 cracks in three seconds. And because it was Camp's first appearance at the convention, he also was named Best New Whip Cracker of the Year, judged on style and performance ability.

"That award has gone to someone from the Czech Republic for the last two or three years, so it was nice to bring one back for the home team," he says.

Camp originally moved his homebound hobby to the stage as a side act with his former band, The Cheesy Messiahs. (Camp now plays harmonica with local pop-rock band Mr. Opporknockity.)



Four years ago, he actively booked more whip-cracking performances, and he hopes it ultimately will phase out his graphic-design business as a full-time occupation.

"After spending so much cash on all these whips, it's nice to see it starting to pay off," he says of his 16-whip collection, valued at about \$4,000. All his whips, except one, are made of kangaroo hide, known for its greater strength and durability. The collection alternates between long-handled Australian stock whips and American bullwhips, adapted to have shorter handles for use by U.S. cowboys.

Among them is a 13-year-old whip created by David Morgan, who made all the whips for "Raiders of the Lost Ark." "I used to tell my wife (Laura) that one Indiana Jones whip was all I'd ever need," he says of the \$458 whip.

Camp's side yard and driveway are two of several practice grounds in and around Springfield. There, he's "busted" his face, chest, arms and back in pursuit of a new skill.

"People who see me outside will sometimes stop on the street, walk up and ask, 'What are you doing?'" Camp says. "But I never mind, because it's an automatic chance to educate people."

It's also where he honors 4-year-old daughter Lillian's gleeful request to "whip her." The whip moves in excess of 900 miles per hour, but any destructive force comes at the point where it makes its crack. By contrast, the return momentum is gentle, but still powerful enough to curl around Lillian's waist.

"Aww, yeah!" yells Lillian with a smile before 2-year-old sister Gabrielle strikes her "big girl" pose (arms raised in the air) for a similar trick. Camp's son Benjamin, 6, also is his target holder.

In between the 60 performance dates this summer, Camp will set his sights on California cracker Robert Dante's world record: 203 cracks in one minute. Right now, Camp can do 120 in 30 seconds, and will work on his endurance so his arm doesn't tire at 40 seconds. He'd also like to begin offering lessons or classes in whip cracking or, at the least, a quarterly workshop.

"Who says you shouldn't let your kids watch movies?" Camp says. "It changed my life." ■