



Seeing Is Believing...

By Rebecca McKinnon Cabinet Press staff, Merrimack Journal

Shawn Cheney was a skeptic. Cheney didn't think he could be hypnotized. But before the night was over, he and about a dozen other participants in the "Hypnosis Extravaganza" at Merrimack High School had done some unusual things under hypnosis.

They believed themselves to be the world's best musicians. They answered shoe phones from the feet of audience members. One student even thought he experienced labor pains and gave birth while others helped with the delivery. People couldn't remember their names or how to count to 10.

Dr. Steve Taubman made believers out of many, during his 90-minute show, proceeds of which went to the high school's Student Council activities. The show began when the hypnotist gave participants a series of quick tests to determine if they could be put under hypnosis.

In one test, he asked the crowd to place their hands together as though praying, and squeeze tightly. "When I reach the number three your hands are stuck together. The harder you try to pull them apart, the more stuck they become," Dr. Taubman said. "I want you to imagine I have just dipped your hands in a bucket of Crazy Glue.

For some, the suggestion worked. Those who couldn't be hypnotized returned to their seats. The chosen sat in a row of chairs placed in front of the audience. Dr. Taubman told them to "make themselves comfortable, kick off their shoes, get rid of their gum. Try to focus on me. Try to tune (the audience) out and focus on what I'm saying and only what I'm saying. Try to forget that they're even there," he said.

Relaxing music played in the background as Dr. Taubman counted backward from 10, asking volunteers to relax one muscle group at a time, as they felt a wave of relaxation roll over them. "If you want to try this from your seats in the audience, just do exactly what I tell them to do. You might find yourself up here as well, before the end of the night," he said.

In their imaginations, Dr. Taubman took his subjects everywhere from the tropical beaches of Jamaica to a movie theater where they watched the funniest, saddest, scariest, most boring and most romantic films they'd ever seen. At Taubman's suggestion that it was the hottest day ever, people fanned themselves and rolled up their pant legs to keep cool. Guys took off their shirts.

At one point, sophomore Derek Jimenez, under the impression that he was a drill sergeant, and barked orders at the group. When classical music played, he became a delicate ballerina, gliding across the floor. Afterwards, Jimenez said it had been a good experience; it left him feeling as if he'd had a nice, long sleep. "I don't know what I was, but right now I feel so good," he said.

Freshman Derrick Stubbs joined the group after he fell under hypnosis while sitting in the audience. Even those next to him didn't know he was hypnotized until they heard a clunk on the bleacher seats as he nodded off to sleep. Dr. Taubman had a dog take Stubbs for a walk. It was the biggest dog Stubbs had ever seen, and it led him all over the room on a big leash.

Stubbs later had no recollection of anything he'd done. "I remember seeing other people do things, but not me," he said. "I feel like I've been asleep forever."

Senior Shawn Cheney became slightly alarmed when he imagined Taubman stretching his nose out a couple of feet in front of him. "I thought it was pretty cool," said Cheney.

"I was so skeptical. I didn't even think it could happen to me."

Student Mary Dillman was asked the name of her favorite celebrity and answered that it was MTV's Carson Daly. Later, she ran up to a police officer and gave him a hug, thinking he was Daly.

When one girl imagined the person sitting next to her had pinched her, resident Ron Bailey laughed like it was the funniest thing he'd ever heard. Taubman had earlier suggested to him that he'd think it funny that someone else was blamed when it was really he who pinched her. Bailey later said it was his first time under hypnosis, but something he'd wanted to do for years.

"I can't really explain the state of relaxation," he said. "You know what's going on, but his voice is the power."