

## **Real Prison Escapes that should not have been possible**

We admit it: We love prison escape stories. On one hand, yes, it usually does mean a dangerous criminal is back out on the street. But on the other, there just is no such thing as a boring prison escape. And when the person doing the escaping is an unimaginable genius, badass, or both? You get stories that'd be considered too far-fetched for most movies.

### **Choi Gap-bok Squeezed Through a Food Slot**

Picture every movie cell door you've ever seen. You know how they've always got that food slot at the bottom, the tiny rectangle guards slide the food trays through? If you need help, it's about 6 inches tall (that is, the length of a dollar bill) and about 17 inches wide.

Now imagine crawling through that slot.

Because a guy actually did this. His name was Choi Gap-bok and at the ripe old age of 50, he was arrested by South Korean police on suspicion of burglary. Gap-bok had been in and out of jail throughout his life, and somewhere along the way he picked up doing yoga. We don't know if he practiced yoga specifically with this in mind or if it just happened to come in handy, but either way, he decided it was time to use the 23 years of stretchy practice he had under his belt to slip right out of his prison cell.

He asked his guards for his special "skin ointment," and they gave it to him, then went off to sleep. After all, when an old man asks for lotion and privacy you don't hang around outside the door. What's the old guy gonna do, lube himself up and squeeze through his food slot?

Yep. It can totally be done (especially if you're not a huge guy -- Choi was 5-foot-4-inches). If you can get your head through it, everything else from your shoulders to ribs kind of compress -- he was able to squeeze all of his parts through in 30 seconds. It's really just a matter of body control and really, really not wanting to be in jail.

Why did he escape? Because he wanted to prove his innocence, and obviously breaking out of prison is the best way to do that. He was caught six days later and put in a cell with a smaller food slot, so now, not only can he not escape, but he almost certainly won't get a turkey at Thanksgiving.

### **Jack Sheppard Becomes a Prison Escape Celebrity**

If you were alive in 18th century London you'd know who Jack Sheppard was. A small-time thief, he became notorious for his awesome escapes. And we're not exaggerating here -- crowds would actually go to his trials just hoping he'd dazzle them. For instance, have you ever seen a movie or TV show where somebody busts out by tying a bunch of bedsheets together into a rope? Well, Jack Sheppard most likely invented that.

Granted, he didn't have a window to drop out of, so he first smashed through his cell's ceiling and then dropped his rope of sheets over from the prison roof. Breaking ceilings is noisy work, so there was a crowd gathered when he hit the bottom. He quickly pulled a Bugs Bunny, telling everyone "He's over there!" and then ran off with the cops in hot pursuit. So, yeah, he was something of a showman.

When he got caught again, he and his wife, Lyon, were thrown in a cell together. They broke a bar off the window and then pulled the "bedsheets-rope" trick again and ran off. So when he was arrested again shortly thereafter, he was locked in a strong-room, stuck in leg irons and chained to the floor. The guards, not enjoying his wacky escapes that, oh, by the way made them look like morons, put even more chains on him.

This did not deter Sheppard. First, he found a nail and bent it to create a lock pick for his handcuffs. Then, using his chains, he wrenched free an iron bar from the chimney (which was ironically installed to prevent prisoners from escaping) and then used that bar as a tool to break through the ceiling. All told, he ended up breaking through six barred doors, jumping to an adjacent house's roof, sneaking inside without waking anyone up and then running off into the night.

When he finally died, it was with a third of London's total population attending his hanging. Ultimately, his fame was his undoing -- the thick crowd actually prevented his friends from taking his recently hung body to a doctor to be revived. Because even in death he had an escape plan.

### **Frank Abagnale Convinces His Guard He's a Prison Inspector**

If you don't recognize the name, Frank Abagnale is the renowned con-man Leo DiCaprio played in *Catch Me If You Can*. He's done bank fraud, impersonated pilots, teachers, doctors, and even lawyers, all using outlandish techniques that you wouldn't even think would work in a cartoon. But maybe none compares to the absolutely ridiculous way he conned himself out of prison.

After being sentenced to 12 years for various forgeries, Abagnale had fantastic luck in 1971 when the U.S. Marshal transporting him forgot the detention commitment papers. No, this didn't mean he got to go free -- not yet -- but it did give Abagnale an opening to subtly convince the guards that he was actually an undercover prison inspector pretending to be an inmate. You know, here's a clean, well-spoken, educated guy who just happens to be missing his documents? It had "The bosses sent this guy to spy on us" written all over it, and Abagnale played it up for all it was worth. This meant the guards treated him far better than any other inmate (since they thought he was there to investigate conditions in the prison) -- Abagnale got better food and privileges than anyone else.

But this article is about prison escapes, and it was right around then that Abagnale decided to go ahead and just bluff his way right out the front door. He called a friend of his, Jean Sebring, who had been visited by the FBI agent in charge of Abagnale's case, Joe Shea, when he was pursuing Abagnale. She doctored the business card Shea left her, then pretended to be a freelance magazine writer doing an expose on prisons and used that to also get the business card of a prison inspector. She visited Abagnale, posing as his fiance, and slipped him both cards.

Abagnale then told the guard that he was, in fact, an undercover inspector just like they thought. He gave them the prison inspector business card as proof, and then told them it was imperative he speak to the FBI immediately. The guards slapped each other on the back and bragged about how smart they were to not be fooled by the government's obvious ploy. Abagnale gave them the other card (the one for the supposed FBI agent), and they dialed the number on it. Abagnale's friend picked up at a phone booth, pretending to be an FBI operator.

She said she needed to meet with Abagnale right outside of the detention center, and, of course, the guards had no problem with this because A) They thought they were talking to the FBI and B) They thought Abagnale was a federal inspector. Of course, it was just Abagnale's friend waiting in a car, and the guards watched as their prisoner just walked out and drove off into the sunset, laughing his arse off.

### **Parkhurst Escapees Build Their Own Ladder, Gun, and Master Key**

In 1995, Andrew Rodger, Keith Rose, and Matthew Williams escaped from the U.K.'s Parkhurst Prison by constructing their own tools. If you're thinking a whittled-down spoon or something, well, that wouldn't have qualified them for this article. First, these guys made a 25-foot-long steel ladder to scale the prison fence, but that's really the least impressive thing they built.

Working in the prison's sheet metal shop, they were able to craft a gun (though someone most likely smuggled them in the ammo), but we're not even sure why they needed it considering they also made a key that unlocked every door and gate in the prison. Which, as far as prison officials can tell, was carved from memory of seeing a prison officer's key.

So, at the end of some gym time the trio unlocked the gym's back door and just walked out of the prison, which is something you can do when you have your own key. They cut a hole in the inner fence and then scaled the outer fence with the ladder. That's pretty easy when you have the right tools.

Unfortunately for them, they were apprehended after four days of hiding in a shed, before they could carry out the even more awesome part of their plan, which was to steal an airplane so Keith Rose (who was an amateur pilot) could fly them off. It turns out the airfield was better at keeping them out than the prison was at keeping them in, and they never made it. Though, honestly, we're surprised they didn't just build their own plane.

### **Sobibor Death Camp: A More Violent Inglorious Bastards**

The previous escapes on this list have been non-violent for the most part, and the truly great escape artists can pull that off -- stealth and ingenuity goes a long way. But sometimes that's not an option. For instance, if your prison is a concentration camp, and your captors are the Nazi war machine. For, you see, uprisings were punished very heavily in the Holocaust; if even one prisoner rebelled in a death camp, the guards would punish/murder two dozen as retribution. Leon Feldhendler, a prisoner of Sobibor Death Camp, decided that was nonsense.

He got together with First Lieutenant Alexander "Sasha" Pechersky, a Russian POW who was sent to Sobibor for being Jewish. The two planned to fight back by having every single prisoner attack at once. Their logic was that the Nazis can't punish people if the Nazis are dead, which is pretty sound, as far as logic goes. SS officers were in charge of Sobibor, but the actual guards themselves were local Ukrainians. Pechersky theorized that the Ukrainians would give up if all the SS officers were dead, so he decided to make that happen.

And so, the prisoners secretly made weapons in the prison workshops, designing knives and other edged weapons, knowing that if at any moment they were caught, they were all dead. Then, each SS officer was individually invited or scheduled to come to different workshops, mostly to pick up things they'd previously demanded be repaired, like clothes or tools. And once everyone was in place, they sprang their perfectly orchestrated trap.

One by one, the Jews killed every single SS officer in the prison.

It didn't matter if the guard was armed or not: One even had a machine gun. They still died. Some guards were suspicious, and they died, too. It was a bad day to be a Nazi. Of the 600 prisoners, 300 escaped. Of those, 100 were recaptured, and 70 total survived the war, higher than any other group that went through a death camp. And all it took was giant balls and perfectly planned, coordinated mass murder.

Hey, how about we all take a moment to be thankful we didn't have to live through that?