Written by Dr. Karen Stollznow
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Following the death of his mother, magician and escape artist Harry Houdini developed an interest in spiritualism. In an attempt to contact her, Houdini spent many years investigating psychic mediums and séances. He never discovered proof of the validity of these claims, although he certainly encountered many frauds.

Houdini met with a “timely” death on 31st October, 1926. Before he died, he had shared a secret code with his wife Bess. He would try to transmit this message to her from beyond the grave. Every year, on the anniversary of his death, Bess attempted to contact Houdini via public séances. Every year, her attempts were unsuccessful. In 1936, ten years after his death, Bess held yet another unsuccessful séance at the Knickerbocker Hotel in Hollywood. She announced that this would be her final attempt.

The secret code included the words, “Rosabelle, believe”. This was a phrase from a play in which Bess had once performed. The message also included a ten-number mind-reading code. The medium Arthur Ford received the code, but the revelation was not so psychic. Bess had revealed the code to him, whereupon Ford lied that he had successfully contacted Houdini.

Over the years, many skeptics have kept up this tradition by honoring Houdini with a Halloween séance. For some 15 years, Joe Nickell has held an annual séance for the Center for Inquiry.

This Halloween, on the 86th anniversary of Houdini’s death, we will be holding a special webcast event. A number of skeptics across the country will join together to contact Houdini (or not, as the case may be).

A number of known skeptics will be involved, including Paranormal Mentalist Aiden Sinclair, Blake Smith of Monster Talk, Mike Edwards of the Alpha Project, and Jamie DeWolf, the great-grandson of L. Ron Hubbard. We will be using a number of tools of divination to attempt to communicate with Houdini, including ouija boards, pendulums, and a Magic 8 Ball. A number of secret questions for Houdini will be supplied by well-known skeptics, including Richard Dawkins, Banachek, and Jamy Ian Swiss.

The Halloween séance will take place at 7pm PT. To watch the event live go to:

www.youtube.com/Warningradio. Click on “Browse Videos”, then “Feed” and you’ll see the “Live Now” streaming video.

If you would like to get involved in the event, contact me at kstollznow@randi.org

Dr. Karen Stollznow is a linguist, author, skeptical paranormal investigator and a research fellow for the James Randi Foundation. You can follow Karen on Twitter here .