

Granddad's String Trick

When I was young my grandfather would do a string trick to me. I never could figure out the secret. Thank goodness, he eventually caved due to my despair and revealed the sneaky little secret. To this day, I've yet to find it described anywhere and completely unsure of the origins. The only close example I've could find is 'The Mouse', described in 'String Figures and How to Make Them' by Caroline Furness Jayne, pg. 340, Dover Publishing. String art and tricks date centuries back and from some of the most native cultures. Caroline's encounter with 'The Mouse' spanned around the globe, ranging from the African Batwa pygmies to Japanese villagers to native American tribes here in the U.S. One could ascertain this widespread string trick, across the globe, probably came from separate rediscoveries by various individuals and not from any sort of literature or tutorial means. But, that was so long ago we will never know for certain. There's a good possibility my grandfather came up with this on his own as well. He was very smart and creative. He grew up penniless during the great depression of the early 1900's and these little novelties of self-amusement were important for the mind and spirit and sometimes flourished among social groups to stimulate conversation and if anything, entertain the family children. Another example of this sort of thing is the round disc with an empty bird cage drawn on 1 side, a bird on the other. It is suspended between two strings and the amuser twirls it by twisting the strings and the illusion of the bird being inside the cage is created. Some of the wealthiest people carried around versions of this for times of boredom and social amusement. A very ancient principle that has endured the tests of time.

Effect: A looped string is hung on the pinky of a hand. The other hand weaves the string in between and around the other fingers, forward then back. The thumb is freed from its bondage and when the string is pulled the other fingers magically penetrate the string configuration. When someone else tries, their fingers get all locked up inside. The demonstration can be repeated and the spectator will still not be able to duplicate the process.

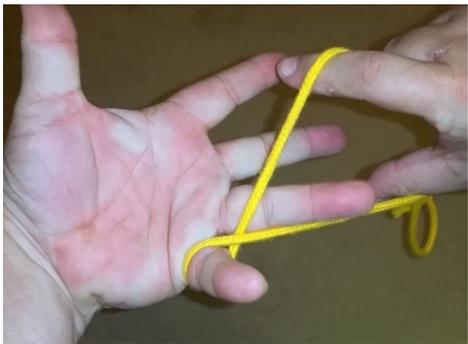
The secret is simple: When the first weaving reaches the thumb an 'X' isn't created between it and the index on the first wrap. This converts the locking process to a nullified state. No one ever notices it during the weaving, I never did nor has anyone the countless times I've shown it to people.

When my grandfather showed the trick, he did it quickly and with a Sideshow-Bob type banter, "*O.K., now watch closely. I take the string and hang it on my little finger. Now I twist it and lock all my fingers inside, just like that. Now, to escape all I do is to free my thumb and all the other fingers escape as well. Here, you try.*" He then handed the string to me and of course my fingers became trapped. He'd ask for the string back and would demonstrate again. I also do it at that speed. The brisk pace is fun to do and fits the routine. You want them to know that you're doing something sneaky and if they don't catch that one moment, you're in the clear. Plus, since the

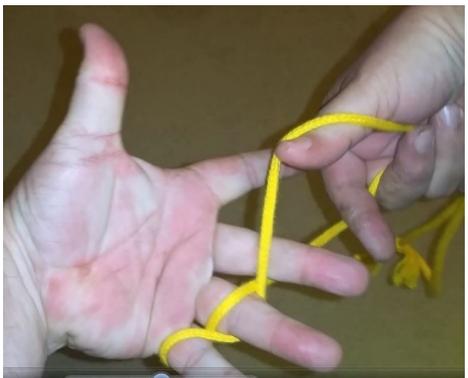
strings are openly removed from the thumb right after the winding the sneaky bit is gone and there's nothing to see.



Dangle the string on the left pinky, the left hand is palm up. The right index and thumb enters the loop from behind, as the middle, ring and pinky close, trapping the hanging portion of string inside. The right thumb and index spread apart as the hand pulls the string taught.



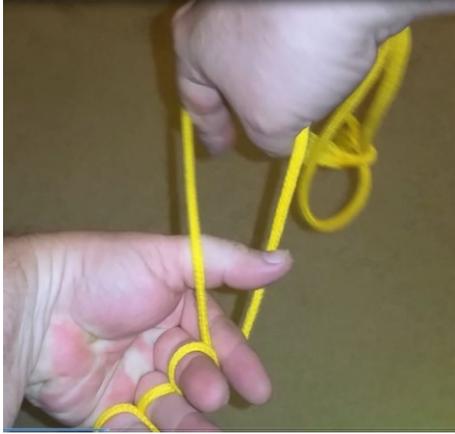
Rotate the right-hand palm down, creating an 'X' and maintaining control of the ropes. The left ring finger enters from underneath. An 'X' has been created between the ring and the pinky fingers.



Now, rotate palm up, creating another 'X', after which the left middle finger enters the loop from underneath. The ring finger is completely trapped on both sides.



Rotate palm down, creating another 'X', then the left index enters the loop from underneath. The pinky, ring, and middle fingers have all been trapped.



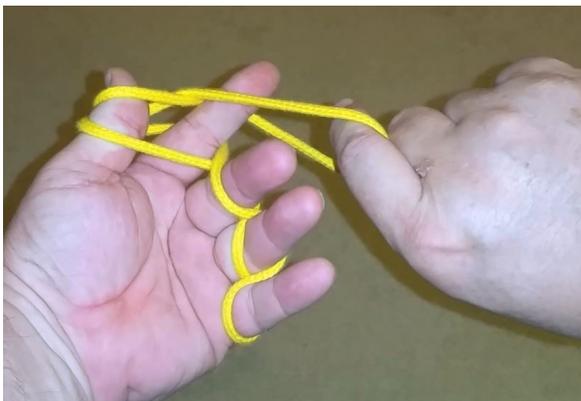
Now for the sneaky part: Quickly move the left thumb into the loop with the index, without creating an 'X' between it and the index. Notice how the left hand is downward. All the spectator can see is the back side of the thumb and the right hand and string.



Without any change in pace, rotate the right hand clockwise, which creates an 'X' on the outside of the left thumb.



Raise the left thumb up into the loop held open by the right index and thumb. An 'X' has been created on its knuckle.



Rotate the right-hand counter-clockwise, creating an 'X' in the string. The left index enters the loop from underneath. This time there is an 'X' between it and the thumb.



Rotate the right hand clockwise, creating an 'X' in the string. The left middle finger enters the loop from underneath,



Rotate the right-hand counter-clockwise, creating an 'X' in the string. The left ring finger enters the loop from underneath.



Rotate the right hand clockwise, creating an 'X' in the string. The left pinky enters the loop from underneath.

The situation is: There are two 'X's between each adjacent set of fingers, except for the thumb and index which only have one. The bottom portion is straight, without an 'X' formed.



Remove the strings off the thumb and pull the string taught.



The string will travel around the fingers. You may have to do a little yanking action during this. It's O.K., fits the trick. My grandad would pretend to yank and tug it through the fingers.



The string will unlace from around the fingers, ...



...until it frees itself completely!

Hand the string to someone and have them try it. They'll fail of course and their fingers will get all locked up. Do it again, you'll amaze yourself they never see the sneaky bit.