



Vancouver stuntman Peter Kent dives away from an explosion in a stunt on the 1994 movie *True Lies*. Kent did the stunt work on 15 of Schwarzenegger's films.

HOLLYWOOD NORTH

The real school of hard knocks

Vancouver stuntman starts up his own training facility for aspiring daredevils

BY JOHN MACKIE
VANCOUVER SUN

In 1984, Peter Kent left Vancouver and headed south, determined to make it in Hollywood.

"I didn't know anybody there, I just packed up my suitcase with \$1,800 in my pocket and went down there," he recounts.

"I was living in the YMCA on Sunset Boulevard for about three months, and found this little casting agency that I'd call for work. One day they called me back and they said we have this little movie that we're casting called *The Terminator*."

Alas, they didn't want Kent for his acting skills. Director James Cameron had noticed the six-foot-five Kent's uncanny resemblance to star Arnold Schwarzenegger, and wanted him to be Arnold's stand-in.

"I went in to do that, and then he said 'We need a stunt double. You've done stunts, right?' I thought 'If I don't say yes, I may not have a job, period.'"

And so Peter Kent became a movie stuntman. He would go on to do Schwarzenegger's stunts in 15 movies, from *Terminator* through *Eraser*. At his peak, he made more than \$200,000 annually.

"I did whatever was required," he says.

"I'm in the CNN Top 10 Greatest Stunts of All Time for my motorcycle jump in *Terminator 2*. The bike jump into the canal off the ledge, when he's chasing another guy on a motorcycle."

It's a pretty impressive feat. Kent flies through the air for an eternity, then touches down at full speed and races after the bad guy.

It looks impossible, and is.

"It was done with a wire, because you can't drop an 800-pound Harley with a rider on it



PHOTO COURTESY PETER KENT/PNG FILES

Vancouver stuntman Peter Kent (left) parlayed his uncanny resemblance to Arnold Schwarzenegger (right) into steady work.

down 28 feet into a canal and expect it to survive," says Kent.

"It was [done] hanging from two wires, [what they call] a traveller. You jumped it off a cliff, [and] there was an overhead crane with cables strung out to another crane. Basically the bike travelled on a traveller across the top of that.

"Though it was dangerous, it wasn't as dangerous as it might have looked. There's no way you could have actually done it for real."

At 54, Kent still gets plenty of acting gigs, but doesn't do too many stunts.

"I do fights, minor things, but I don't do the heavyweight

stuff any more — I've got two year-old boys that I'd like to be around for," says Kent, who moved back to Vancouver in 1997.

Kent learned how to be a stuntman by trial and error, and tips from his fellow stuntmen. "If it wasn't for the help of those guys I would have either been dead or not had the career I had."

But he doesn't recommend bluffing your way in the way he did — he thinks stunt men should be trained. And so he's started up Peter Kent's School of Hard Knocks, which he claims is one of only three stunt schools in North America.

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"We cover pretty much everything, from full burns to car hits to you name it," says Kent.

"We get a whole gamut of people [enrolling]. We've had strippers come out that just felt like they wanted something to do, and we had a guy who just finished beating cancer. We were trying to make a reality series about [the school], and we interviewed his wife. She said, 'He went from death to death defying,' because he had leukemia."

Nathan Lehfeltd says getting cancer "definitely changed my outlook on life. A self-professed 'adrenalin junkie,' he decided to check out stunt work because it offered the opportunity "to go after a dream instead of a career where you just pay the bills and do the daily grind."

The School of Hard Knocks lived up to its name.

"We learned everything from film fighting to firearm proficiency, wire work, wall running, how to get hit by a car, [being set] on fire, high falls, underwater fighting — just about all the skills you need to get into the stunt community," Lehfeltd says.

It isn't a course for the faint of heart.

"For the high fall, we jumped off the top side of some bleachers into a foam mat," recalls Lehfeltd, 30.

"We also went off a warehouse building into cardboard boxes and a foam mat. It's a little hairy ... it takes some nerve

to build yourself up to jump, and trust yourself that you're going to land properly without injuring yourself."

The scariest part of the job? Being set on fire.

"That's a trip, I'll tell you," says Lehfeltd.

"You don't want to breathe, because if you breathe in the fire you're hooped. [But] there's enough burn gel [on you] that you can feel the heat but you don't feel the burn."

There are tricks to being set on fire, of course. You don a Nomex suit, which is made out of fire retardant material. Then you put a retardant fire gel on any exposed skin, such as the face and hands.

"It has to be monitored carefully and put on all the time, so that it doesn't dry up," explains Kent. "If it dries up, you don't get the protection from it."

Once everything is in place, the stuntman is "lit up" for 30 to 60 seconds, "depending on how much you freak out."

"They stagger around and then we put them out with fire extinguishers," Kent says. "And throw cold towels and furniture pads over top of them."

Kent has done all the stunts, and knows there isn't a margin for error.

"I almost got killed on *Eraser*," he says.

"I got hit by a three-and-a-half ton overseas shipping container, a hundred feet in the air. The doctor said it would have broken my back, had I not been

in the shape that I was in."

In the film, Schwarzenegger fights it out with James Caan on top of the container as it drops to earth.

In reality, it was Kent and another stuntman. The stunt was carefully planned, but there was a malfunction.

"When you drop a box like that, you fall with a wire alongside it. In this case, the four wires that hold the shipping container up have to be cut simultaneously for it to fall flat, and they weren't. One of the cable cutters didn't fire properly. So now you have three and a half tons angrily spinning on one axis, and me intending to fall with it to the ground, pulled away before the last impact.

"Instead of that, the thing slugged me into a warehouse wall. [The other guy] managed to ride the box, I got the worst of it."

"I was in [hospital] for about a week. I broke my top three ribs, scapula, collarbone. I was laid out for awhile."

The irony is, it was all for naught.

"We almost died for it, and they didn't even use the footage," says Kent.

"At the end of the day all the footage for that piece had to be computer generated, because all of us were in the hospital."

For more information on the School of Hard Knocks, go to www.peterkent.com.

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How to plummet 10 storeys without killing yourself

Hollywood stuntman shares the art of high falls, stair falls and falling through glass

BY JOHN MACKIE

Peter Kent on some of the tricks of a stuntman's trade:

• A "high fall" is when you jump off a building that's at least 10 storeys.

"You're usually into an airbag," says Kent, who produced an award-winning series on stunts called *Stunt Dawgs* in 2006.

"The trick is to get your landing right and not to go in feet first or head first, because they can result in a broken neck or a torn spinal cord. I know people who have done that, unfortunately. You go in flat on your

back or [do] an 'over,' where you go head down and at the last second you flip your legs over and go in on your back."

"The old school method is box catchers. You use a big square cardboard box, three foot by three foot, they stack those one on top of the other, then stretch a tarp over top of all that.

"That's old school. Sometimes if you're out somewhere where you don't have access to electricity and can't use an airbag, box catchers are your only method."

On the Schwarzenegger movie *The Last Action Hero*, Kent fell 18 storeys using a third method, a wire.

"It's a free fall, but you have a wire on your back," he says.

"The wire slows you down, so as you come closer to the ground the speed wicks off until you just touch down. But for the first 15 or 16 floors you're in a free fall, right at the concrete.

"The luxury of that shot is you can look over the person who is falling's shoulder and see the ground, there's no airbag to give it away. They remove the wire on computer. It's a pretty good rush. Especially knowing that if the cable breaks there's nothing to stop you, it's just splat, right to the pavement."

• A "stair fall" is when you go

ass over teakettle down stairs.

"The trick is to try to keep your chin tucked in to your chest," he says. "If the director wants you to go head first straight down the stairs, that's what you do. Otherwise, you ride the walls, like back and forth between the walls to take some of your speed off."

A solo stair fall is completely different than doing one with another stuntman.

"The thing is, you want to get on top of them and ride them all the way down the stairs," he chuckles.

"That's why when you see a couple falling down a flight of stairs, it looks hairball as hell,

because each guy is struggling to get on top of the other guy to ride him down the stairs, to take the worst of the beating."

He laughs, but doing stunts can be painful.

"You've got to give credit to the stunt women," he says.

"A lot of times the guys are wearing pads and stuff under their pants. [But] then you'll get a woman in a skimpy dress doing a stair fall, and you can't hide anything under that. I give kudos to a lot of the [stunt] women out there, because many times they take way more of a beating than the men do."

"We want you to do this in a frigging negligee. Okay."

• Going through glass can also be tricky.

"They break [the glass] with what's called a squib," he relates. At the second of impact, a little charge goes off and smashes the glass. Back when I was in great shape, I had to do a *Baywatch* episode where I went out a set of plate glass patio windows onto the deck of a house in Malibu, landing in the glass, in my underwear.

"That cut me up pretty good — it's not fake glass, it's real glass. I landed in all these glass particles and sliced the hell out of my back."

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