SHAKY ODDS

BET YOU CAN'T HOLD YOUR HAND STILL

THE SETUP: Unfold a paper clip. Smooth out all the bumps and bend it into a "V" shape. Put the "V" upside down on the back edge of a table knife. Hold the knife over a table with the ends of the wire resting lightly on the table. Try to hold the wire still. You may not rest your hand on the table or any other object.

THE FIX: The strangest part about this "walking wire" is that the harder you try to hold your hand still, the faster the wire walks down the back of the knife. Muscles are made up of cells that exist in alternating states of contraction and relaxation. When you contract your muscles to hold a position, only some muscle cells are in a state of contraction. Others are relaxing and recovering, getting ready to take their turn. This constant changeover creates a very slight motion or tremor that can't be seen easily. The walking wire magnifies this motion. The harder you try to hold your hand steady, the harder your muscles are working and the greater the difference between the tensed and relaxed parts of the muscle.

Note: This can also be done with metal hairpins.