

RAWe

Everyone wears a mask, running around pretending to be something they're not. And if people are phonies, it means they must be hiding some pretty unflattering facts about who they are. Oh, I can hear you now: Speak for yourself buddy! But you see, I do include myself--I might just be the biggest phony there is. Because if I dropped my mask, people would run, screaming.

Now don't get me wrong--I'm not a monster. It's just that I have this really bad temper, and I have to keep it on a pretty tight leash. Just about everything makes me angry--politics, religious assholes, universal health care, traffic jams, and most people; you name it, it probably gets my blood pressure up. Hell, sometimes I think I was born pissed off. And so, I wear this mask to get along with people, and not get locked up.

Every now and then the masks come off. The most common type is that guy who's popular as hell at the office or on the job site, and then when he gets home he smacks his wife and kids around because he's really this miserable prick inside. But then there're the other types, like me, who hide certain

aspects of their personality almost all the time--you hear about it, people who are married for years before they finally start to figure out who it is they've been sharing a bed with.

I was married for seven years before my ex-wife, Lisa, caught a glimpse of that pissed off guy when the mask slipped one time in heavy traffic. I really don't blame her for divorcing me--no one should ever live in fear. I never beat her or my daughter, and I would jump off a bridge before I'd hurt them--but that look she saw on my face when the mask dropped freaked her out pretty bad, I guess. So like I said, I really can't blame her.

Since the divorce last year, things have been worse. I've graduated from punching walls and the like. For example, today I put this massive-grade-A-asshole in the hospital--or so I assume (I know I messed him up pretty good). It went down something like this:

I'm standing in the checkout line of the Shop-n'-Save supermarket. Elevator music (an especially droll rendition of the Carpenter's We've Only Just Begun), the mechanical beep of some device, and the low hum of scores of people provide a mind-numbing backdrop--it is something like hell.

As I'm loading my groceries in the cart, an attractive brunette and her husband--an obvious lout--pull in behind me. Now, I'm single again, but I respect people--this woman is obviously with this dude, so I nod at both of them respectfully, and don't take a second look at the cleavage that is beckoning for attention (I'm only a man, after all, and the goods are on display). The teenage girl on the register seems more interested in checking out the teenage boys loitering over at the Subway shop than doing her job, so things are dragging along.

The tension builds when the two love-birds behind me start arguing in one of those loud "whispers" that everyone for a hundred yards in every direction can hear. I just want to get the hell out of there, and do my best to ignore them. But then the argument gets louder, and apparently the source of the conflict is yours truly. It turns out that Monsieur Dumbass thinks I looked too long at his woman, or she paid too much attention to me--who the fuck knows?

All of a sudden Dumb-Ass gets up in my face. "This here's my wife," he says, all-redneck stupidity, insecure because he can't make his wife stop showing off her silicon tits.

I can't ignore this guy anymore, because his muscle shirt, skull and crossbones tat, and stinking breath are right up on me. So the blood-pressure ticks up a notch, and I feel the mask slipping a little. But I tighten the leash, all Mr. Cucumber (cool), and reply, "You're a lucky man."

I guess it wasn't the right thing to say, because the guy clenches his fists and says something witty along the lines of "You better shut the fuck up before you get bitch-slapped." (I paraphrase, because in the heat of the moment some details get fuzzy). Anyways, I feel the grip on the leash that holds my temper slipping along with the mask, but I still hold on, and tell Numb-Nuts that I don't give a shit about him or his wife, that I just want to get the hell out of the store without anyone getting hurt. Admirable really--I mean, this guy's begging for an ass-kicking, right?

I don't remember details after he pokes me in the chest with a grubby finger, but the shrill screams of the cashier and the man's wife finally bring me back to myself, and I know that the mask really slipped aside there for a bit. I almost feel sorry for the dummy as he lay there with his blood pooling on the tiles of the Shop-'n-Save. I drop the twelve ounce can of Libby's peas I beat him with, and get the hell out of there before the cops come.

No legal difficulties ensue. Can you imagine the local news sensation, though, if someone had recognized me, and it came out that a popular junior high school social studies teacher had beaten a man near to death with a can of peas?

And now you know why I wear that mask.