

January 4, 2021

## *Masks*

Dear Friends,

Rather than saying ‘happy new year,’ let me simply hope and pray for us all that 2021 be a year of healing, comfort, blessing, growth, and health. Good riddance 2020! Don’t let the door hit you in the @\*\* on the way out!!!

By now, you all must be getting used to wearing those damn masks everywhere. It may be uncomfortable and inconvenient, but it is life-saving after all. And we grieverers are pretty used to wearing masks anyway. People may not see the kinds of masks I am referring to, but many of us who are grieving are sometimes more comfortable hiding our true selves and feelings from those around us for a myriad of reasons.

Sometimes we feel quite vulnerable and would rather pretend we are doing better than we really feel. We may say we’re fine when we are far from it. Sometimes we may feel that we may be burdening others by sharing our true feelings. There is also the understandable avoidance of people saying things to us that are not helpful, sharing cliches and platitudes about which they know nothing. It also may be our way of simply avoiding how little our grief is understood or valued. “A mask may be hard to wear and sometimes it may slip, but in time, some grieverers have a mask for every situation. What they have trouble finding is their own face.” (Jan Warner, *Grief Day by Day*).

The resilience of human beings never ceases to amaze me. Wearing these kinds of masks is a remarkable example of our resilience and ability to adapt and cope, to survive. We take these masks off, of course, when we are with those who are supportive and nurturing, who understand us and do not want to fix us; those who are able and willing to walk with us wherever we may be on this quest, this trek, this arduous journey to find our own face again.

“Like Batman, all of us hide behind our masks and use them to help define ourselves for others. They’re not lies, really. They’re just not the whole truth, because...most of the people we encounter day-to-day couldn’t handle the truth (or perhaps we couldn’t handle giving it to them).” (Paul Asay)

It takes a certain courage to confront people with our raw and honest truth. I recently called my sister, who last June lost her husband of over 45 years, and I said something I never usually say anymore. I have learned over time not to say or ask, “how are you?” to someone who is grieving. I usually say, “It’s nice to see you,” or something other than the empty and vapid sounding “how are you?” But on this particular day, and on this particular phone call, I forgot and I said, “How are you sis?” She replied, “Well Jack is dead, so there’s that.” With that response I was reminded of the vapidness of my question, but I was also deeply pleased that my sister was comfortable enough with me to rip off her mask and say what she said.

It certainly is ok to wear masks when we need to. But it is also very important to be able to remove them when we are in safe space and in good company, so that we can share, grow, and heal. People around us may not understand that we are in fact learning how to live again; how to not only survive but to move forward somehow. Healing doesn’t mean that the pain goes away. It means that the pain becomes a sacred part of us. This takes time, as much time as it needs, and it takes patience, our own patience with our self and the patience of those who love us and want to support us.

“Without the mask, I will know who loves and accepts me as I am. If you accept me as I am, I will, in turn, accept you as you are. That is genuine and meaningful love.”

(Jan Warner)

Peace and Serenity in 2021 and always,

Kevin Keelen

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