

I stopped hiding behind the masks

By David M., North Carolina

My oldest daughter and I were driving past the house where we had lived until she was eight years old. I asked her, “Do you remember living in that house?” She said she did. So naturally, I asked, “What do you remember?”

She said, “I remember my third birthday party in the backyard. You had a clown come and we all cried because the clown scared us.” Her reply struck me as odd, yet somehow profound. What scared my daughter and her friends was the fact that they could not tell who was behind the mask.

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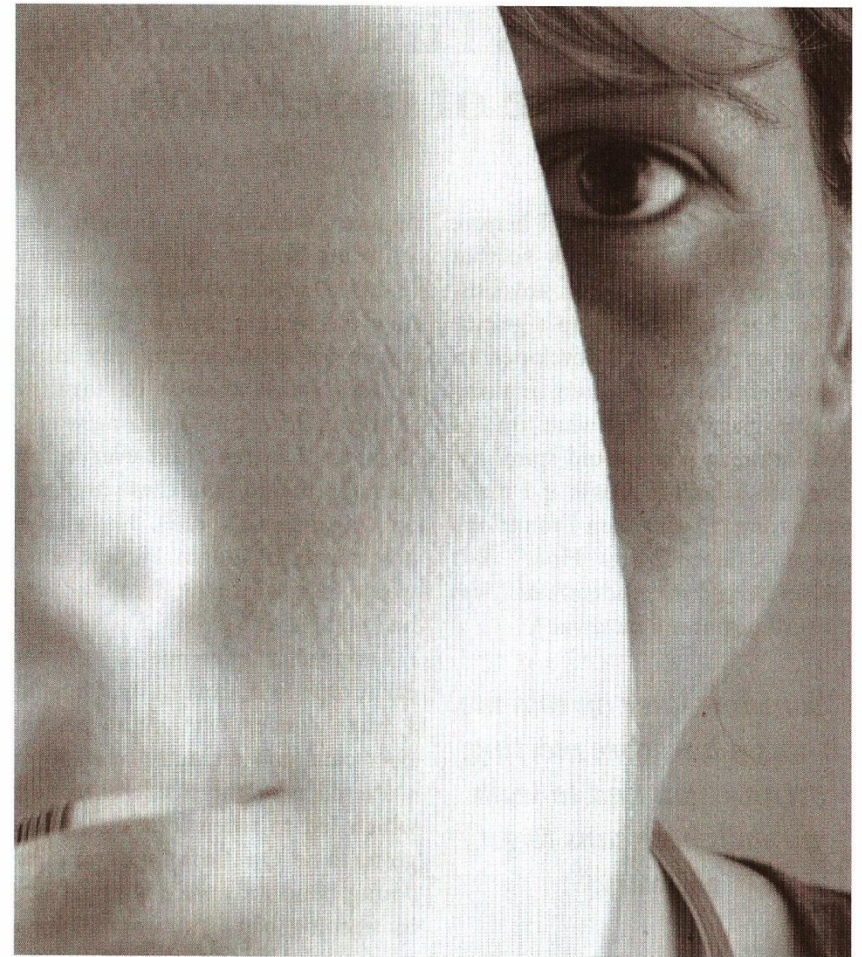
Many times, before I worked this program, I would wear masks every day. Depending on the occasion or circumstance, I’d throw on a mask to fit my need. I had become afraid of letting people see the real me, afraid of letting them see my shortcomings, out of fear that they would not like or love me.

At work, I threw on a mask of authority and power in order to seem in control. At home, I threw on a mask of contentment – everything is okay – out of fear that my family may not love someone with my problems.

In social situations, I would often put on a mask of self-righteousness and pride. “I have my life together, so don’t ask me how I am doing. I don’t need any help. I don’t want any fellowship with you people who are down and out. I’m okay.”

Sometimes, I had a mask of rationalization that I put on in compromising situations, a mask that tried to show others, “I am really just like you. Please accept me.”

On and on I went, shuffling my masks on and off from situation to situation, until one day my masks failed me. No matter how good I was at this game, eventually cracks developed from all the wear and tear of changing masks. As the cracks developed, people started seeing the real me. Some even reached out to help, but that mask of pride, which had now become a prison of pride, would not allow anyone inside.



All the masks became prisons of guilt, resentment, and self-centeredness. The prisons became solitary confinement for me. I found myself in isolation—built in my mind, built by my actions, and built by losing the real me somewhere behind those masks caused by this family disease. It took a long time to build these prisons out of masks, so I have to remember that it will take time to tear them down.

The most complex part of the solution for me was saying the simple word “help.” Working the Steps with a Sponsor was the beginning of removing my masks. I feel so free again and not isolated within this terrible family disease—no more physical, mental, or emotional isolation. As I worked through the Steps, I found the real me again, a new improved version of me.

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