



All of us spend our time and energies in ways that seem truly important to us, individually. Once in a while — but not often enough, probably — we are jolted out of our routines by something we read or hear or see.

Some months ago someone passed me a copy of some "thoughts" about "feelings", about how people feel underneath the surface. It seems to be worth considering for most of the time too little thought is given to how other people feel and what our actions can mean. We think too infrequently about whether what we say and do will help someone else, or hurt him.

Acquiring a copy of these thoughts was the first step to sharing them with you. Re-writing it for publication and sending it to the paper is the second step.

The third step is yours to take, and also the fourth. Thinking about it, and acting upon its message. I hope you will.

"Please Hear what I'm not saying"

Don't be fooled by me.

Don't be fooled by the face I wear, for I wear a mask; I wear a thousand masks, masks I'm afraid to take off. And none of them are me.

Pretending is an art that's second nature to me, but don't be fooled; for God's sake, don't be fooled.

I give you the impression I'm secure, that all is sunny and unruffled with me, within as well as without; I give the appearance that confidence is my name and coolness my game, that the water's calm and I'm in command. I behave as though I need no one.

But don't believe me. Please!

My surface may seem smooth, but my surface is my mask, my ever-varying and ever-concealing mask. Beneath dwells the real me in confusion, in fear, in aloneness. But I hide this. I don't want anyone to know it.

I panic at the thought of my weakness and I fear being exposed. That's why I frantically create a mask to hide behind, a nonchalant, sophisticated facade, to help me pretend, to shield me from the glance that knows.

But such a glance is precisely my salvation, my only salvation; and I know it. That is, it's my salvation if it's followed by acceptance and love. It's the only thing that can liberate me from myself, from my own self-built prison walls, from the barriers I so painstakingly erect. It's the only thing that will assure me of what I can't assure myself, that I'm really worth something.

But I don't tell you this. I don't dare. I'm afraid to.

I'm afraid you'll think your glance will not be followed by acceptance and love; I'm afraid you'll think less of me; I'm afraid you'll laugh, and your laugh would kill me. I'm afraid, deep-down, I'm nothing, just no good, and that you will see this and reject me.

So I play my game, my desperate pretending game, with a facade of assurance without, and a trembling child within. And so begins the parade of masks, and my life becomes a front.

I idly chatter to you in the suave tones of surface talk. I'm telling you everything that's really nothing, and nothing of what's everything, of what's crying within me.

And when I'm through my routine, don't be fooled by what I'm

saying. Please listen carefully and try to hear what I'm not saying, what I'd like to be able to say, what — for survival — I need to say but what I cannot say.

I dislike hiding. Honestly! I dislike the superficial game I'm playing, the superficial, phony game.

But you've got to help me. You've got to hold out your hand even when that's the last thing I seem to want or need. Only you can wipe away from my eyes the blank stare of the breathing dead. Only you can call me into aliveness.

Each time you are kind and gentle and encouraging; each time you try to understand because you really care, my heart grows wings. They begin as very small wings, very feeble wings, but wings.

With your sensitivity and sympathy and your power of understanding, you can breathe life into me. I want you to know that. I want you to know how important you are to me, how you can be a creator of the person that is me if you choose to. Please choose to!

You alone can break down the wall behind which I tremble; you alone can remove my mask; you alone can release me from my shadow-world of panic and uncertainty, from my lonely prison. So do not pass me by. Please do not.

It will not be easy for you. A long conviction of worthlessness builds strong walls. The nearer you approach me, the blinder I may strike back. It's irrational, but despite what the books say about man, I am irrational. I fight against the very things I cry out for. But I am told that love is stronger than walls, and in this lies my hope. My only hope.

Please try to beat down those walls with firm hands but with gentle hands, for a child is very sensitive.

Who am I, you may wonder . . . I am someone you know very well. I am every man and I am every woman. I am me, and I am you.

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The author is unknown, but whoever wrote this, originally, was speaking for all of us. Young people and middle-aged people and older people — all of us. We can find ourselves speaking those words, inside ourselves; and we all know that to speak them aloud, to another person, would be the very last thing we would dare to do.

We wouldn't let our feelings come to the surface, be exposed to hurt, to rejection, to the ridicule we fear would follow. We adjust our masks and pretend we have no feelings such as these.

And yet, we all do have them and we all do feel this way, and we all hope, somehow, that those we love and want to love us will know how fragile and vulnerable we are, inside.

We all hope they will hear what we're not saying, will know what's happening to us behind the masks, and will be understanding and gentle — not only because we are, ourselves, so soft and undefended — but because they, too, are soft and undefended.

Please listen to what is not said. If the ideas expressed seem to say, for you, what you could never say for yourself, remember that everyone else could never say it for himself or herself, either.

Someone, someone lots smarter than I am, has said it for us. All I'm doing is passing it along and hoping, through it, to help two people break through the barriers that need knocking down.

Maybe the barriers lie between parent and child; maybe they stand between friends; perhaps they separate husband and wife. They could prevent understanding between boss and employee, between neighbors, or lovers.

Wherever the seeds of understanding fall, I'm sure a certain percent of them will light upon fertile ground, and somehow help some people; some will fall on stone; some will land in a rushing stream of unhappy feeling and be carried to the ocean, there to rot.

It's the ones that take root and grow that will make writing this well-worth the effort. Won't you — hold out your hand to a person you know who feels this way?