

Masked and Smiling from Six Feet Apart

by Dennis Payton Knight

I have adopted quite well to the notion of emerging from my unit wearing a mask, even finding stretches of time when self-consciousness diminishes, and I forget it's there. That happened yesterday at the grocery when I smiled at a young lady, also masked, when we had a near collision at an intersection in the frozen goods department, and she smiled back.

My first thought was to ask myself why I bothered when my smile was covered, and my second was to wonder how I recognized she had returned the smile from behind her own mask. The answer is that it's all in the eyes.

A genuine smile is conveyed as much with the eyes as it is with the curvature of the lips. Our eyes are a window to our soul. It's in the sparkle, and you can't fake it. I am reminded of my dad singing, "When Irish Eyes are Smiling."

We are cautioned in the midst of this pandemic to stay home, and we do so to do our part in fighting it. We are directed to wear a mask when we emerge, and we do that too. We may go out for no other reason than to retrieve the newspaper, check the mail, or dash to the grocery for necessities, but always we don the mask.

Charlie Chaplin told us to smile in the song Nat King Cole made popular to our generation in 1954. "Light up your face with gladness," the song goes, and "You'll see the sun come shining through."

If you emerge masked but wearing a frown, it won't be detected. No harm done, no trace you were even out there. You got your errand done quickly and you can hang the mask back up on a hook by the door.

But if you greet the world while masked with a smile in your eyes, someone may just smile back and, who knows, that may go viral, too. Wouldn't a pandemic of smiles be a fine way to finally beat this evil one down? Put on a mask, but light up your face with gladness, and you'll see the sun come shining through.