

Who Was that Masked Man?

by Dennis Payton Knight

Yesterday, the Colorado health department posted an order specific to Windsor Gardens residents to wear a mask when venturing forth from our units. It's a reasonable order to increase the effectiveness of social distancing for our vulnerable population of seniors.

I'm happy wearing the mask because it makes me feel like I'm playing cowboys and robbers all over again. When I ordered a passing friend to "Stick 'em up," he said he would if I would, but we were too old and too far apart for a proper exchange of wallets.

It brings memories of the Lone Ranger on the radio. The William Tell Overture would thunder to life and then stay through the show, rising and ebbing to inspire our imaginations and move the story along. Has there ever been better theme music in the history of radio and television?

As kids, we came into the action ten or fifteen years after the series began in 1933, but we learned along the way our hero was the sole survivor among six ambushed Texas Rangers. His brother, who was in command of the squad, was among the dead. He was found at the scene by an Indian named Tonto.

Tonto recognized the survivor as John Reid, who had saved his life when they both were children. Tonto gave him a ring and the name Kemo Sabe, meaning faithful friend. Reid told Tonto he intended to hunt down his ambushers and bring them all to justice.

To conceal his identity and honor his fallen brother, Reid fashioned a black mask from his late brother's vest. To aid in the deception, Tonto dug a sixth grave and placed a cross bearing the name John Reid to make it appear all the Rangers had been killed.

The Lone Ranger fought evil for decades on radio and television and was never seen without his mask or in some other disguise. If he was ever forced to draw his gun, he never shot to kill, only to disarm his foe as painlessly as possible, which was quite easy to accomplish on radio. Tonto rode always with the Lone Ranger and was generally portrayed in a dignified way that departed from typical stereotyping.

The Lone Ranger never revealed his identity. If he was challenged about his mask by a local lawman, he would present a silver bullet as his only needed means of identification. It was silver from his secret mine that also decorated his saddle, provided the name for his magnificent steed, and let him ride the range fighting evil with no other visible source of income.

Episodes would end with someone asking the local sheriff, "Who was that masked man?"

"Why, that man is the Lone Ranger."

And in the distance came a hearty "Hi-Yo Silver, away!" And they galloped away to the rousing strains of the William Tell Overture.

I wonder if that masked man could do something about this pandemic. Cue the overture!