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BLOWN OUT OF PROPORTION

Dear Editor,

It was just a prank, and it has been blown all out of proportion.

First off, we would like to apologize to the two girls that we frightened and their families. A sincere apology would have been the best solution to all of this; we'd like to be able to apologize face to face. I admit that my friend and I **did** make a childish mistake and a bad judgement call, but the repercussions and consequences we are facing have greatly exceeded our actions.

Secondly, I would like to make it very clear that the truth has been grossly distorted. I am baffled by the absurdity of this situation and the level to which it has escalated. My friend and I are friendly, good-hearted kids with good intentions. Lies have been spread to vilify us and portray us as something we are not.

I would like to reveal the truth, so that this whole ordeal can be resolved and put behind us once and for all.

My friend and I love to make people laugh and smile, so we tend to joke and prank occasionally. Ever since the old man prank in the movie "Jackass" we have always wanted old man make up or a realistic mask so we could prank people. You could call it a social experiment.

I found an old man mask online for a few dollars so I purchased it. Once it arrived, my friend and I were excited and began using it immediately. I wore it at Office Depot and my friend rolled me around in an office chair claiming I was his grandpa. We went to Divers Direct and asked if I was too old to go scuba diving. We wore the mask to South Beach as well, and got many laughs and pictures and even took a video of people's reactions. We had plans to put our jokes on the internet to get some laughs from viewers and maybe a little web-fame. The point I'm trying to make is that we are completely harmless and have never had bad intentions with our jokes.

So this incident happened one night after showing the mask to some friends at a local hang out. We left the place on foot, walking home on the road, when we saw two girls approaching us (it was dark so we had no idea one of the girls was underage). We wanted to try to talk with them so we thought we could use our mask to initiate conversation and that's exactly what we did. My friend put on the mask and approached the girls as they were walking up the stairs to their apartment building. They ran up the stairs to their apartment, which happened to be directly in front of where we first saw them. My friend followed them up the stairs and I was on the ground watching (NOT blocking the exit).

When my friend saw that the girls were actually frightened, he removed the mask and apologized, and explained how we were just joking, and I felt sure that the girls knew that we were harmless and friendly. We talked for a few minutes and invited them to a dance/fundraiser we were throwing (which was later canceled due to the slanderous flyers handed out at our venue). The girls considered hanging out with us but then changed their minds.

So they went inside and my friend and I went on our way and thought nothing more of it. About a week later we were playing basketball at the park when four men stormed the court and beat us up because they claimed that we "pinned a 15 year old girl against a wall." Then, the next thing we know, flyers with my friend's face on it, containing multiple lies, defaming his reputation and further endangering him, were circulated around town. If the flyers handed out to the public had said "watch out for these pranksters, they joke a lot," then I would have nothing to deny, but these were vicious. A fake Facebook page was also created under my friend's name, claiming false statements such as "raping 15 year old girls in Key Largo." Over 90 friends were added from our hometown in New Hampshire.

We all know two wrongs don't make a right and I want the truth to be revealed and justice to be served. I am enrolled in college and supposed to be at school in August in New England. I worked for six months saving money for school and had given my notice and quit my job so that I could get ready for basketball season. Now I have had to spend all of my money just to get bailed out of jail and I am must remain in the Keys until after trial... All because of a harmless prank. Please know we meant no harm.

Jared Holmes
 Key Largo FL

Editors note: These are kids who were playing a harmless prank and acting their age. The 4 adult men who allegedly beat up these boys were not.

Feeling Fed Up with Humanity In the World and in Ourselves

We are all capable of the best and the worst that humanity has to offer and knowing this allows us to find compassion

From time to time, we may all feel fed up with humanity, whether it's from learning about what's going on around the world, or what's going on next door. There are always situations that leave us feeling as if people are simply not capable of behaving in a way that is coming from a place of awareness.

Often it seems as if people are actually geared to handle things in the worst possible way, repeatedly. At the same time, none of us wants to linger in a judgmental mood about our own species. As a result, we might tend to repress the feelings coming up as we take in the news from the world and the neighborhood.

It is natural to feel let down and disappointed when we see our fellow humans behaving in ways that are greedy, selfish, violent, or uncaring, but there are also ways to process that disappointment without sinking into despondency. As with any emotional response, we honor our feelings by feel-



ing them fully, without judging or acting on them. Once we've done that—and we may need to do it every day, as part of our daily self-care—we can begin to consider ways that we might help the situation in which humanity finds itself.

As always, we start with ourselves, utilizing our awareness of the failings of others to renew our own commitment to be more conscious human beings. We are all capable of the best and the worst that humanity has to offer, and remembering this keeps us in check, as well as allowing us to find compassion for others.

We may find ourselves feeling compelled to serve people who are suffering injustices at the hands of other people, or we may begin to speak out when we see something that we don't think is right. Whatever the case, the only thing we can do is pledge to serve the best, rather than the worst, of what humanity has to offer, both in the world, and in ourselves.

To hate a person is a waste; half the people you hate don't care, and the other half don't know.

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