

The Art of Removing a Wedding Band

by Jeff Goldberg

If I was going to liberate myself from my marriage to Rosie, the first step ought to be to liberate myself from my wedding band. That wasn't going to be easy. Along with the more prominent rolls of fat I'd been accumulating, my ring finger now bulged over the upper edge of the ring. I'd had it on so long, in fact, that the changing shape of my finger over the years had reshaped the hard gold band from a circle into an oval. Simply pulling or twisting it off would be impossible. I'd tried lubricating ring and finger with lotion picked up from some Marriott during some business trip. It hardly budged—and it hurt. What to do? The answer, of course, to Google “getting off stuck rings”—which yielded a host of creative solutions. Having already eliminated lubrication with soap or lotion, I decided to try dental floss.

The technique made sense—beginning at the top edge of the ring I wound row after row of dental floss tightly around my finger up to the knuckle like fishing line on a reel. The idea was to compress the finger in order to be able to slide ring over floss and remove it. It took half an hour of preparation, turned my finger blue, and failed.

The ring became the focus of my overwhelming desire for freedom as my mind flashed on images of the manacled wrists of felons and slaves, of Tony Curtis and Sidney Poitier shackled together at the ankles in *The Defiant Ones*, and scattered fragments of other random half-baked facts; like wasn't the wedding band rooted in humankind's dark past when females were not just clubbed on their wooly beans but also shackled to a stake near the man's family hut to be fucked or eaten, or both? I'd read somewhere that over time the manacle got smaller until it was finally a tiny band worn on the finger. But why was I the one wearing the band? Rosie

had lost her's within months of our wedding (slipped off while she dangled her arm out the window on a country drive in our newly acquired Ford Taurus wagon), and two replacement rings were also gone.

At that point I was quite sure my options were limited: a) go to the emergency room to have doctors cut the ring off with a surgical saw, or b) cut off the finger Yakuza style. I'd fucked up enough to deserve it.

At the office I'd taken to concealing my bulk in tentlike Hawaiian shirts and one day, when I'd worn a blindingly bright blue and white dragon motif, the Japanese-Chinese-Korean girl gang at the agency, who called themselves the Asian Mafia and were led by tiny but lethal lotus blossom May Lim Lam Law, had given me the nick name Dai Lo, meaning Big Shot, they'd said, but it might have meant Big Shit for all I knew.

"Dai Looooo0000," I could hear the Big Boss rasping in a hoarse whisper, extending the last vowel ominously and pointing a big boney finger at me. "You make big mistake. You big enabler and big codependent. Soby. You know rule."

I'd gotten myself chained to the stake of domestic husbandry like ancient Adam cursed by God to till the soil and earn his pitiful sustenance by the sweat of his brow amid the fickle upheavals of wind, rain, hail, and the whims of a paranoid Creator. But now I was free, wasn't I? On the run, but free. And I had to get rid of this reminder of the chains that bind. "Go on Big Boss, chop it off! I deserve it!" At the same time thinking the mutilation might look interesting, and remembering what Salvador Dali said about amputations; how the dowagers of old would lop off the limbs of their sex slaves to, in theory, force blood from their missing extremities into their cocks to make them better lovers—maybe even the solution to my own little intimacy issues. "GO ON, BIG BOSS, DO IT!!"

But extreme measures often as not prove unnecessary. What worked was the solution that jewelers use—the ammonia based lubricant commonly used to get glass surfaces squeaky clean:

Windex. I sprayed it on and twisted. It hurt like hell but the ring moved up towards the knuckle. I sprayed again. It really hurt now but the ring moved on top of the knuckle. One more spray. I held my breath and twisted, holding the ring with a dishtowel, pulled and it slid off. I felt sick from the effort and the emotional finality of the act. My stomach churned and my heart pounded. Twenty years. There it was. Twenty years since I'd slipped it on, and I'd never taken it off. The growth of my finger had distorted its shape, Rosie and I had distorted its meaning.

I tossed it into my underwear drawer, glancing only briefly at the initials inscribed on the inside of the band, JS/RF, mixed a brandy and ginger, took a long swallow—and with that my marriage ended. Only the scars remained.

