

Though I'm NEVER Drunk, I'm ALWAYS Disorderly (memoir)

by Rick Rofihe

1971. When I was still a student and first visited New York City, the couple at whose place I was staying suggested we take a walk to the piers near the entrance to the Holland Tunnel. While we were crossing the roadway there, where the signs clearly prohibit pedestrians from crossing, a policeman who saw us yelled, "Get out of there, you fucks!"

1978. Soon after moving to New York, I parked my car, with its still-out-of-state plates, in Times Square (in what was clearly a no-standing zone) because a couple of visiting friends wanted to get out and look around. I was leaning on the car door when a policeman on horseback came riding by. While I did my best to appear an innocent tourist, he looked at my plates, then at me and said, "Move it, you fuck."

1987. Recently, I told a teenager who was smoking a cigarette in an elevator that he should put it out. "You a cop?" he asked.

1981. When, in a supermarket checkout line, I suggested to a fellow who had butted in front of the woman ahead of me that he move to the back, the woman turned around and said, "So, you're a cop?"

1983. Shopping with a friend at a used-clothing store, I found, among the \$180 "Genuine Swedish Army Issue" long, lined, black leather coats, a similar NYPD coat for \$80. It was in perfect shape and it fit just right. I sought out a salesperson and asked, "Why is it so much cheaper?" "Nobody knows from Swedish army officers," said the clerk, "but a cop coat..."

Undeterred, I asked the person I was with, "Should I get it?"

"Are you crazy?" she said. "It makes you look like a cop."

Shortly thereafter, a man I know found himself walking beside what he described as a beautiful young woman in midtown one day. He said he couldn't help being confused by her appearance. She was wearing rather delicate shoes, an expensive watch, a finely tailored skirt and blouse, and good jewelry and was carrying a partially wrapped single long-stemmed red rose—all right so far, but she also had on what looked like an old, short leather police jacket. My friend became even more confused when she kept looking his way and smiling.

"I felt like Gee, I should respond," he told me, "but instead I crossed the street."

"You thought she was a cop, right?" I guessed.

"No," he went on, "It wouldn't bother me so much if she was a cop. I was thinking, What if she's also the friend of a cop?"

1980. Driving in Manhattan one day with a fellow I work with, I stopped at a light alongside a two-man patrol car. "Pigs!" my co-worker, a veteran of Berkeley student-radical days, blurted out, loudly enough that I was thankful that both of their car windows and ours were closed. I told him that I'd read that these days young Lower East Side felons refer to the police merely as "pests."

“Well,” he sneered, “what do you call them?”

1982. A neighbor of mine who makes large, colorful masks figured that the pre-Halloween weekend would be a fitting time to sell his product, and that the sidewalks of SoHo, with its upscale crowds, would be the perfect place. But he had no license, and the police caught him and confiscated his masks. As his wares were being loaded into a police truck an officer told him that besides having to appear in court and face a probable \$100 fine, he'd have to come down to the station and pay \$65 to get his masks back.

“Sixty-five dollars!” exclaimed my neighbor. “A guy I know only had to pay \$20! Why is it \$65 for me?”

The cop could have explained that the retrieval fee was \$65 when the vendor sells in an area where selling is prohibited, as my neighbor had done, whereas if the vendor is merely selling without a license, the fee is \$20.

But the cop didn't.

“Because,” he said instead, looking at him, then over at the masks, “because I don't like your faces.”

2010. I'm sitting on a bench outside a take-out place in the West Village when a woman comes running, fast. She stops by the bench and pushes something down into the trashcan there next to me. She resumes her run. I pick the item out of the trash and inspect it—nice shirt, Dolce & Gabbana tags still attached; I place it back down in the can.

A policeman soon appears, out of breath, looking right, looking left.

"It's in the trashcan," I say to him.

He fishes it out. "Hey," he says to me, "you're not as dumb as you look."

