

# I Just Have **1** Question

## What's Your Super Power?



by Doug Carpenter

“Look! Up in the sky! It’s a bird! It’s a plane! It’s **SUPERMAN!**”

I don’t know about you, but there was always something about that opening line from the mighty Man of Steel’s 1950s TV series that sounded a little *off*. [And not just because of the weird problem they seemed to have trouble telling a bird from a plane.]

It just didn’t strike me as the sort of conversation you would’ve heard on the bustling sidewalks of downtown Metropolis, where I doubt the locals would’ve given a second thought to seeing a guy in bright blue tights, red swim trunks and a cape zooming around in the clouds above their heads.

Although witnessing someone defy gravity would almost certainly have blown the mind of anyone from *our* reality, on their *fictional* Planet Earth, it probably would’ve been just another Tuesday afternoon.

That’s because *they* lived in a world where “super heroes” who swooped in dramatically to save the day actually existed — physique-flattering costumes, futuristic crimefighting gadgets and all.

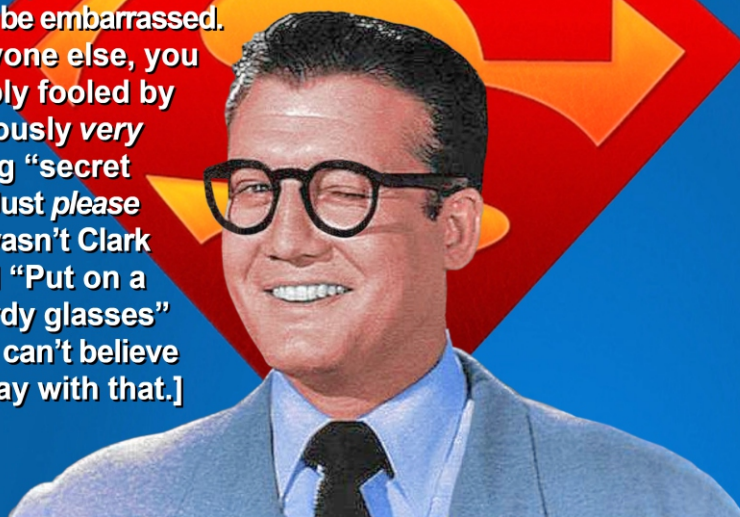
The funny thing, though, is that — in an equally-real and very culturally-impactful way — so do *we*. And while we may not see any coverage of caped crusaders battling for truth and justice on CNN or Fox News, it’s nearly impossible *not* to see them almost anywhere *else* you look.

Tales of their amazing abilities, daring exploits and perpetually-on-the-verge-of-exposure secret identities were once confined largely to pulp fiction anthologies, “B” movies and those monthly must-haves for millions of kids, comic books.

Back then, we had no way of knowing how addictive our read ’em-and-toss ’em relationship with those magazines would turn out to be — *or* how much it would ultimately *cost* us. If we *had*, though, the math might’ve added up very differently — at least for *some* of us.

Superman’s June 1938 debut in the very first issue of *Action Comics* went

If you never realized that you, in fact, are a super hero, there’s no need to be embarrassed. Like everyone else, you were simply fooled by your obviously very convincing “secret identity.” [Just *please* tell me it wasn’t Clark Kent’s old “Put on a pair of nerdy glasses” trick. I *still* can’t believe he got away with that.]



for just 10¢ at the corner newsstand. But by the time that magazine’s 1000th issue was published in 2018, the cover price had risen a whopping 79.9% to \$7.99.

Arguably, a price increase like that might *seem* pretty steep, until you consider that over the same 80-year period, inflation also drove up the price of everything *else* by nearly 1682%. [Imagine how big our allowances would have to be to support a comic book habit *today*.]

Apparently *someone* had generous parents, though, because when one of the fewer-than-100 remaining copies of Supe’s now-historic *and* highly-collectible first print appearance was auctioned off just last year, an unidentified bidder paid a record 3.25 million dollars for it!

The fact that something that originally cost that *little* could end up being worth that *much* certainly gives one cause to stop and think about our society’s values [...unless, that is, you once actually *owned* that specific comic, in which case for obvious, potentially-

depressing reasons, do yourself a favor and *never* think about it *again*.]

Still, for what’s basically a few old, stapled-together sheets of paper, that’s an awful lot of cash to blow [...for all we know straight out of their kid’s college fund.] But in a world where super heroes are the magic money machine of popular culture, it’s *chump change*.

If you want to talk *really* big bucks, try *this* figure on for size: 28 billion dollars. That’s how much revenue Superman publisher’s main competition for comic lovers’ hearts, minds and money — Marvel — has generated worldwide from the 29 blockbuster super hero-themed *movies* they’ve cranked out just since 2007.

It’s hardly any wonder that when Halloween rolls around, kids of all ages can’t *wait* to hit the trick-or-treat trail or party scene decked out as box office record-breakers like Marvel’s Spider-Man, who for years has ranked as a favorite for October 31st’s big “Come As Who You Wish You Were” party.

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- Louise, a resident

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The only ones *more* enthusiastic may be the retailers they get their hero threads *from*, whose costume-driven commerce dressed up their 2021 bottom lines to the tune of more than *three billion* of the \$10.14 billion spent celebrating fright night last year.

But if by some unlikely chance there aren't any Spider-Men or Wonder Women among the candy-craving hordes storming your door *this* year, you can still easily catch a glimpse of someone "super" any time you like. Just look in the nearest mirror.

As strange as our fascination with these otherworldly heroes may be, stranger still is the equally-intense *disinterest* so many residents of *this* world seem to have in recognizing and utilizing the very *non-fictional* "super powers" that lie within each and every one of us.

If you never realized that you, in fact, *are* a super hero, there's no need to be embarrassed. Like everyone else, you were simply fooled by your obviously *very* convincing "secret identity." [Just *please* tell me it wasn't Clark Kent's old "Put on a pair of nerdy glasses" trick. I *still* can't believe he got away with that.]

The truth is *we all do it*. At various points in our lives, we all play "dress up." Just replace the word "costume" with "outfit" and you're describing the universally-shared, countless-repeated experience of preparing to make an appropriate impression in a particular situation.

I, for instance, have always referred to the nice suit I'd invariably wear to a job interview or some other important function as my "Grownup 'Take me seriously' clothes." [Even so, to be *completely* honest, it takes considerably more than a *suit* for someone like *me* to pull that off. But it *was* a start.]

And the list goes on. Any time you socialize, your fashion choices are *loaded* with serious make-or-break implications, as I vividly recall learning back when I was dating my *then* future wife.

Although it didn't come to light until

many years after the fact, I was horrified when I discovered that she had absolutely *hated* what I selected to wear for our first night out together. [I fully realize *now*, of course, that how *I* thought I looked is completely irrelevant to the story.]

But the miracle that I was given a second chance to *unmake* that bad first impression speaks volumes about how kind a person *she* is and how lucky *I* am to be the guy who gets to hang around her — then *and* now.

Just as there are times we're more than happy to reveal qualities we *want* the world to see, we all have aspects of our personalities that we'd just as soon keep tucked away behind our ego's invisible privacy screen — a process that isn't always easy.

With practice, though, we can and *do* get pretty good at it. Sometimes *so* good, in fact, that we even manage to hide really *important parts* of ourselves *from* ourselves. Those super powers, for example — like our capacity for compassion.

Watching the increasingly-frequent news reports about all the people in our community and around the world who go hungry every day can be both emotionally moving and frustrating, particularly if we see a problem like food insecurity as being just *too big* for one person alone to solve.

We forget, though, that solutions don't always *have* to be big to be effective. And that when it comes to changing the world, we're never really alone — although day to day, far too *many* of us have far too *little* human contact.

And though we may not be able to alleviate hungers that deep in every soul we encounter, as Mother Teresa said, "If you can't feed a hundred people, then *just feed one*." [Actually, it works out to be *two*, since feeding them also nourishes *you*.]

The same goes for helping the lonely... or those whose spirits need lifting but are weary from worry... or who can no longer do for themselves something as simple as read a book or a newspaper. Lives that could be changed for the better by someone who's far more "super" than they realize.

Average yet *extraordinary* people equipped with the ability to offer others quiet companionship... or uplifting encouragement... or simply a kind, reassuring voice that could help them stay connected with the world.

And yet we choose to keep so many

of these potent "powers" to ourselves for reasons even *we* sometimes can't explain — the most unfortunate of which [...not to mention the most *ironic*, considering that our *make-believe* heroes' powers give them *courage*...] is *fear*.

*Our* fear, however, isn't the kind that's triggered by danger — or for that matter by the *also-scary* thought of what we'd look like literally *poured* into one of those embarrassingly-tight super-hero-to-the-rescue suits. [And I'd *definitely* take a hard pass on the cape.]

More likely, it's a fear of *failure*. Of allowing ourselves to care — actively and passionately — and then tapping into our powers for what might well turn out to be an *unsuccessful* effort to help.

Regrettably, there's no way to guarantee that that won't *happen*. But there *is*, sadly, a way to insure that it *will*.

A much-admired member of *another* of our world's leagues of "heroes" — hockey legend Wayne Gretzky — once insightfully observed that "You miss 100% of the shots you

*don't take*." Real heroes, apparently, at the very least *try*.

You already possess the *super* powers you need to "save the day" for someone. You just need to summon the *will* power to use them, as openly or inconspicuously as you're comfortable with.

But if you really *would* prefer that the world *not* know about your "heroic" deeds, don't worry. Your secret identity is safe with me.

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Throughout *After 50's* first 16 years, veteran WNY writer and columnist Doug Carpenter regularly shared his wry generational observations with readers as *Everyboomer*. He has now returned to write a uniquely-named new monthly humor/opinion column called *I Just Have 1 Question* — which he says he'll ask and then bravely try to answer... without, he fervently hopes, looking excessively foolish in the process. [We wish him luck.]

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