

Eye of the Tigger: Winnie's Worst Nightmare

By Jeff Girod, published June 27, 2007

I couldn't tell if the pink blotch on Matt's forehead was from rug burn or my costume, or the shame of knowing he'd been pinned by a half-crazed man in a Tigger suit.

It was 1997, and both Matt and I worked four 10-hour shifts a week, 8 p.m. to 6 a.m., at a publishing plant near downtown Los Angeles.

We also split rent on a questionable upstairs apartment, situated between two carwashes, a gas station, an animal hospital, a liquor store and directly across the street from a one-room bar called Easy Pickens.

Working all night and sleeping all day — combined with the depression of both recently being dumped by long-term girlfriends — had left us with the complexion of vampires.

It didn't help that we ate every meal in rundown cars outside of a Jack in the Box (the dining room is typically closed when you work the graveyard).

In a word, we were losers who rarely showered or did laundry and had frequent renter cards at Blockbuster.

So to pass the time, I did things like grooming my head with a straight razor or eating 5 pounds of sour candy in one sitting, or, as in this case, dressing up in one of my "themed" costumes.

I had several, including camouflage pants and a jacket, or an all-black outfit I put on to talk like Johnny Cash, or this night's ensemble, an XXL fuzzy Tigger costume, complete with hood,



feet and tail.

To Matt's credit, he rarely passed judgment, probably because we had separate bedrooms and locking entrances.

But tonight he'd left his door ajar, and Tigger was on the prowl.

I stood in his doorway and waited for him to speak first.

(I'd borrowed this technique from a Tony Robbins infomercial. It was supposed to give me the upper hand.)

"H-hey, buddy," Matt said, with the look of a Sambar Deer gauging a predator uncertain it can outrun.

I took a step closer. "You're not leaving this room until Tigger gets a hug."

Matt pulled his legs to his chest, a classic defensive position. I slid my plushy ears up over my head.

"I guess we're doing this the hard way."

We wrestled, scratched, punched, poked, cursed and bit each other for more than a half-hour.

Orange and yellow tufts of synthetic fur wafted upward, both of us drenched in sweat and fighting for oxygen.

"Give . . . Tigger . . . a . . . hug."

"No-o-o!"

Finally, with a knee in Matt's neck and 220 pounds compressing his sternum, he relented.

"Fine . . . I'll hug . . . Tigger."

And then very briefly and awkwardly, a man and a 6-foot-3 Disney character locked arms — momentarily forgetting their crummy jobs, scary apartment, clunky cars, vindictive ex-girlfriends and uncertain futures.

Since that fateful night more than a decade ago, Matt has been a constant golfing buddy, flag-football teammate, alibi provider, financial adviser, handyman, computer expert, best man at my wedding and one of the closest things I have to a brother.

It's funny where shared trauma can lead you.

It was either this or jail.