

## Masking Emotions

If you've ever bitten your lips to keep from blurting out sentiments that would undoubtedly cause offence, if you've ever smiled when your heart was breaking, or if you've ever frowned when you've wanted to laugh, you know what masking emotions is all about. When people want to avoid expressing what's going on inside, they create the opposite facial expression with their pliable facial muscles and skin, and hey presto! they're masking their emotions.

I recently attended a luncheon party and sat across the table from a woman whose mother had died two days previously. Before eating, the guests were asked for a moment of silence in memory of Dottie. I was fond of Dottie and was saddened to hear of her death. I looked at her daughter, whom I didn't know, and as we caught each other's eyes we exchanged poignant smiles. Anyone watching would have seen that we both held our mouths tightly with no showing of teeth – hers slightly pulled to the side, mine more a straight line – our eyebrows tense across our foreheads, and we gave each other slight head nods for fear that doing more would allow the sense of loss to come flooding forth. Although we were doing our best to cover our sadness, a careful observer would have noticed the struggle it took to maintain the mask.

After the Falklands War the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was interviewed on television and asked why a British submarine had been instructed to torpedo the Argentine battleship, the *Belgrano*. Purportedly annoyed that she had to undergo the journalist's questioning, and knowing that it was important for her career that she was seen as informed, calm, and in control, she explained that because the ship was inside the British exclusion zone the action was justifiable. Both she and the journalist knew that was a lie. The truth was that the ship was sailing away from the Falklands and was outside the exclusion zone when attacked. While Mrs Thatcher was making her false reply, her mask fell for a split second and she revealed a brief expression of anger. She gave a quick smile, which anyone looking carefully could detect was false from the lack of engagement in her eyes followed by a momentary flash of anger. Her eyes protruded and her jaw thrust forward. As quickly as the expression appeared it was replaced by her masked expression. A jutted jaw and protruding eyes indicate anger or annoyance.