

to right. There's DC's Guardian in Washington, DC, who wears a full-body stars-and-stripes outfit and wanders the troubled areas behind the Capitol Building. According to Peter Tangen, the community's unofficial adviser, DC's Guardian has "extremely high clearance in the U.S. government. Nobody knows what he looks like. Nobody knows his name. Nobody knows his job. Nobody knows the color of his skin. I've seen him with his mask off. I've been to his house for dinner. But that's because of the level of trust he has in me."

And there are dozens more, like Salt Lake City's Citizen Prime, who wears steel armor and a yellow cape and is in real life "a vice-president of a Fortune 500 financial company," says Peter Tangen. Like the majority of real-life superheroes, Citizen Prime undertakes basically safe community work, helping the homeless, telling kids to stay off drugs, etc. All are regular men with jobs and families and responsibilities who somehow have enough energy at the end of the day to journey into America's more needy communities to do what they can. Phoenix is reputed to be by far the most daring of them all, leaping fearlessly into the kinds of life-threatening situations the other superheroes might well run shrieking from.

Every superhero has his origin story, and as we drive from the hospital to his apartment, Phoenix tells me his. His life, he says, hasn't been a breeze. He was raised in an orphanage in Texas and now spends his days teaching autistic kids how to read. One night last summer someone broke into his car. There was shattered glass on the floor. His stepson fell into it, badly gashing his knee.

"I got tired of people doing things that are morally questionable," he says. "Everyone's afraid. It just takes one person to say, 'I'm not afraid.' And I guess I'm that guy."

So he retrieved from the floor the mask the robber had used to break into his car, and he made his own mask from it. "They use the mask to conceal their identity," he says. "I use the mask to *become* an identity."

He called himself Phoenix Jones because the Phoenix rises from the ashes and Jones is America's most common surname. He was the common man rising from society's ashes.