

Today is October 4th. Here is a question that some of you might be able to answer....Do you remember where you were 50 years ago tonight? I do...I was tuning across the radio bands on a short wave receiver in my upstairs bedroom back home in Pennsylvania.

At just about this hour on a cold night in 1957 from a small launch pad in the Kazakh republic of the USSR, the Soviet Union launched the world's first artificial satellite, called "Sputnik". It was a 183-pound sphere carrying two one-watt radios that emitted a strange beeping sound.

Amazingly, within 3 minutes of the launch our government received a report from a ham radio operator confirming the frequency and the sounds that Sputnik was sending. That ham operator, with the call sign K7UGA, happened to be a senator from Arizona, Barry Goldwater. He was also a brother Mason. And although in 1957 Freemasonry in Russia was officially 'non-existent', one scientist on the launch team, a French National, Pierre Lafret, was present as that V-2 rocket left the launch pad and broke the bonds of gravity. He too, was a member of the Craft; his mother lodge was in Paris.

Two Masons, on opposite sides of the earth, were witness to an event that literally launched what became known as the 'space age'. That's how I remember where I was on October 4th, 50 years ago!

Ok, We just went back 50 years...how about going back a bit further in history for what I call....

Frozen Words.....

In 1863, during the American Civil War...or as one of my colleges at the office refers to it'The war of Northern aggression'....there was a battle fought early one morning. Who fought it, or where, is not as important as something that occurred during that confrontation. It was an early morning in late spring and the troops around the field headquarters were just finishing their breakfast. The daylight is soft and smoke from the cooking fires drifted toward a thick wooded area near the camp. The General and some of his officers were busy reviewing the plans for the day when a mounted soldier galloped up to the General's tent frantically calling for orders and reinforcements. To his astonishment, the General learned that his army's forces were engaged in a fierce and bloody battle, less than a quarter of a mile away...that's only 1300 feet! Thousands of men with canons and rifles were fighting to the death just on the other side of the woods, and no one at the headquarters camp had heard a sound...not one sound!

Sound has done other strange things. Visualize that you are walking on the traces of old, slowly melting snow, and breathing in the pungent smell of the earth as it begins to thaw after a long, bitterly cold winter. Suddenly, you strain to hear what seems to be the clashing of metal and screams of agony just over the next hill. You race up the hill to see what's going on....and you see....nothing, except another tranquil valley of rolling hills and lush greenery in the distance. Not a person in sight! Throughout history there are tales of the sounds of winter battle being heard around the time of a spring thaw. There are at least two documented reports of the noise and cries of battle from the forests of the Argonne that were frozen in time, heard by at least a dozen soldiers as the thaw arrived. And yet another similar incident related by a tank commander and his gunner who fought in the Battle of the Bulge in WWII. Imagine that! Sounds, frozen in time by the bitter cold.

The concept of frozen sound isn't a new invention by any stretch of the imagination! Antiphon, an ancient Greek, used the idea of 'frozen words' to describe a slowness to accept wisdom. He said, "As the cold of certain cities is so intense that it freezes the very words we utter, which remain

congealed until the heat of summer thaws them, so the mind of youth is so thoughtless that the wisdom of Plato lies there frozen, as it were, until it is thawed by the ripened judgment of mature age”pretty heavy thoughts from this ancient Greek.

And I thought about words of wisdom lying frozen, awaiting mature reflection to thaw them out, and that brought to mind Masonry’s analogy of our three degrees corresponding to youth, manhood, and old age, and how each degree’s lesson bestows on the candidate a progression of more and more ‘light’ to the ardent seeker of Masonic knowledge.

In the Lecture of the Entered Apprentice Degree, we receive a deluge of Masonic knowledge and wisdom, so much more than we can possibly absorb in one night with all that is happening around us. But, you know, our first night in the Lodge is where we get the core of values for our Masonic development, just as moral guidelines and social rules are impressed upon us in our youth. This Masonic ‘light’ outlines Masonic behavior, and becomes the measuring stick for our Masonic development.

And just what are these lessons, these wise words that we receive? They are the lessons of Faith, Hope, and Charity. They are the virtues of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice. They are the principles of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.

It struck me that sometimes in our haste to progress, in the degrees of Masonry; we are like Antiphon’s youth. In our nearsighted focus on achieving proficiency in the degrees and moving on to the next, we pass by the lessons and moral values in our degrees; we learn the ‘test’, but not the subject matter. The lessons and moral values become separated from our pursuits and us, much like the General I spoke of who was separated from the sounds of battle by that thick wooded area next to his camp.

But, the measuring stick of our progression in Masonry is not marked by our advancement through the degrees, alone. Our true progression in Masonry is marked by how well we understand and live the richness of Masonic ‘light’. And that is dependent upon the effort we spend in reflection, in allowing ourselves, as Antiphon said, to ripen with it into mature age. This kind of reflection allows us to rediscover and truly hear the wise words left behind us in our journey from west to east.

For many Brethren, having moved quickly through the degrees and now too busy for reflection, Masonry’s lessons and moral values are the sounds not heard through the woods; they are the frozen words, waiting for a spring thaw....a thaw that perhaps may never come.

So, let us take it on as our obligation to Masonry and to ourselves, to travel again through what we have passed by, to retrace our steps from west to east and from east to west again. That’s the true meaning when we are asked if we ‘have traveled’, and if so, whence we came. We travel not only toward the east in search of light, but back to the west again, with the light. And, as we travel we should grow in Masonry. As our judgment ripens with it in mature age, we are to reflect on that spring of our Masonic ‘first light’: Faith, Hope, Charity, Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, Justice, Brotherly Love, Relief, Truth.

These are not frozen words.... they are warm and comforting words, and yes, they are words to live by.