

## *It's Really Quite Simple....*

In my on going research for these nuggets that I prepare each month, I correspond with Brethren from around the world. I begin with a true story one of them shared with me...he said it's true because he was present the night this happened in his lodge.

The youngster was probably around 23 or 24 years old. His name was Eddie, he had wild hair, wore a T-shirt with holes in it, jeans, and no shoes. This was pretty much his wardrobe for Eddie his entire four years of college, where he ended up near the top of his physics and plasma science class....he was kind of esoteric, but very bright. He became a Mason during his junior year at UCLA. After moving to a small coastal town where his first job was located, he discovered that just two blocks from his apartment is a very old, well-respected, and very conservative Masonic Lodge. One day Eddie decides to go there right after work. He walks in wearing jeans, open collar sport shirt, work shoes, and his ever present long hair.

The meeting has already started, and after being examined, the Tiler announces (with somewhat raised eyebrows) that he is indeed a sojourning brother, and admits him. The lodge is completely packed and Eddie can't find a seat. By now the rest of the Brethren are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Eddie walks closer to the East end, after he realizes there are no empty seats, he just sits down right on the carpet near the Secretary's desk. (Although perfectly acceptable behavior at a college fellowship, trust me, this had never happened in this Lodge before!) By now the Brethren of this very conservative Lodge are rather uptight, you can hear the buzz from the sidelines, and the tension in the air is thick. About this time, the Secretary notices that from the far end of the Lodge, a Past Master is slowly making his way toward Eddie.

Now this Past Master is in his late eighties, has silver-gray hair, always wears a three-piece suit. A good man; well respected, very elegant, and dignified. He walks with a cane and, as he starts shuffling toward this boy, everyone is thinking to themselves that you really can't blame him for what he's going to do. How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid being in the Lodge? It takes a while for the old man to reach the spot where Eddie is sitting. The Lodge room has become absolutely silent except for the clicking of the man's cane.

All eyes are focused on him. It's so quiet you could hear a pin drop...even on the carpet. The Master can't continue with the business of the Lodge until the old Past Master does what he has to do. And now the Lodge watches as this elderly man drops his cane to the floor, and with great difficulty, lowers himself and sits down next to Eddie and welcomes him so he won't be alone.

When the Master finally regains his composure, he says "What I'm about to say, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget. Brethren, be careful how you live. You may be the only Mason some people will ever meet."

It has been said that the actions and character of a Mason speak more eloquently about our fraternity than all the books and pamphlets written about our organization. Brother Woodrow Wilson once said....

*"If you think about what you ought to do for other people,  
your character will take care of itself."*

Perhaps it's true that all institutions ultimately move away from their roots, or if you will, their orthodoxy.....after all, times do change. As people move through their organizations; some will greatly affect the organization, and others won't. And over the long haul, it's sometimes very difficult to keep the institution's original definition and the member's purpose for joining in focus.

Today, for instance, it seems that every Grand Jurisdiction has at least one brochure defining Freemasonry, explaining Masonic principles, and what Masons do. They tell the world who we are, and who we are not; what Masons believe, what we do in Lodge, the kinds of charities we support, our importance in the world, why people should join us, and how to join. In addition, almost every national Masonic organization has jumped on the bandwagon and published one or more brochures of their own....and Virginia is no exception.

On one recent expedition into the ethernet of the World Wide Web, I found 2,167,523 pages with information about Freemasonry, and much to my surprise I found separate links to least 26 of my nuggets that you hear each month in Lodge. Then, of course, we sometimes suffer from our share of "not-so-informed" information about Masonry that shows up from time to time in the media, and especially on the Internet. On that same visit to the web I found 273,824 listings for 'anti-Masonic' information, most of that posted by folks who really know nothing about us, some posted by those who used to be one of us but for some reason have demitted, or most likely been expelled and just want revenge against the Craft. These jaundiced critics include today's anti-Masonic movement by some well known television evangelists, individuals who like to print hate messages, and representatives of some fundamentalist churches of various faiths with the wrong mission in their heart. We've had our share of those in recent memory, but we always respond with the truth, and the naysayer's are put in their place, once again.

Personally, I don't mind any of the critics. The fact is that, although it's extremely difficult to define Masonry in a single promotional brochure, Grand Lodges and other Masonic organizations should make as much available in the way of Masonic education as they can to both their members and the general public. My opinion.....We are moving in the right direction here in Virginia with our Masonic Education, but we can always do more. By the way, if you haven't seen our Grand Lodge web page lately, the Masonic Education page has been revised, and vastly improved over what was available even last year! In my view, the anti-Masonic materials actually do little damage. Of course it raises questions, but we do get some attention, even when the information is bad. When I was in the broadcast industry we had a saying that even if your listeners are saying bad things about your programming, or your on-air personalities; defend yourself, work hard to fix the problem, and just roll with the punches....hey, at least they're talking about you!

I'm still idealistic enough to believe that most people form their own opinions about an organization regardless of what they might read about it. I hold to the ideal that thoughtful people will generally give little credence to information that appears biased in its content. And, while I have never met a thoughtful anti-Mason, I expect the reason they pay so little heed to all the education we try to give them is that they assume we're just as biased as they are! It really makes little difference.

But what does make a real difference to everyone is that we hold on to our orthodoxy. The creed of Masonry is moral action. Masonry to the world is the *character* of Masons. In short, the character of a Freemason does indeed speak more eloquently than all the books and pamphlets written about our gentle Craft!

This means that in the community where Masons are known as such, and are men of high integrity, the Fraternity generally stands in high regard. And in the community in which there are some Masons who do not have the respect of the public, Masonry has no chance of being accepted as a beautiful system of morals and ethics worthy of support and membership.

It's just that simple. The reputation of Freemasonry is literally in the character of each Mason. It is within your power, within the power of every member to glorify or diminish the fraternity. The bottom line is that the Mason who lives up to our teachings and the obligations he took of his own free will and accord, will be a man without reproach in all his dealings - not only with his Brethren, but also among his neighbors, family, friends, his fellow church members, and within his community.

I believe it's important that we, as Freemasons, understand that a significant portion of the general public will never read a word about Masonry or know of its charity in the world. Its idea of the Fraternity may never be very well-defined. And on the sole basis of judgment alone, the public will fall back on the character of the men they know as Masons and who, therefore, are supposed to exemplify Masonic teachings.

Generally, if given a choice people will not read books about institutions such as Masonry; people will read other people. Masonry to them is what they "read" in the temperament and behavior of its members. Of course, this places an awesome responsibility on every Mason. The fact is that one bad example can do us a lot of harm. When one of us is caught up in some public scandal, or unethical business dealing or an immoral act, the public takes it for granted that Masonry either condones such lapses or is too weak to be of enough influence to prevent such behavior from within its ranks.

I guess it boils down to this....in a practical, public sense; we are what other people say we are. Thus, the best argument for Freemasonry is a 'good Mason'. Just as the best example of humanity is a good human. You see, you and I really do have a heavy burden, an obligation if you will, to be the very best example of our fraternity that we can be.

In the past few years I've managed to create over 40 educational 'nuggets from the quarry'. Every time I sit at my laptop to prepare for one of these presentations I manage to kill off a gaggle of brain cells...and they don't regenerate as fast as they used to, you know? In a weak moment I decided to try my hand at rhyme....and so, with my deepest apologies to our resident poet, Rt.Wor. J. Ned Culler, I offer the following:

*Now just relax if you will as I share this short verse,  
And perhaps some wisdom, to you I'll disperse.  
Think back to the day when as a Mason you were brand new,  
And all of the experiences and things you went through.*

*We can all have good, warm thoughts if we just reminisce,  
And now, for that wisdom, I leave you with this.  
A Freemason is much more than the sum of his parts,  
You need only look for the goodness that's deep in our hearts.*

*It's really quite simple...* recall the obligations you took at the altar, and do your very best to live up to them. It all comes down to character.