

Robert Wales Carpenter, Jr - A Remembrance

By: Douglas Messimer

I'm sure you've heard the often-repeated adage 'Life is a journey'. I don't know who first said that, but it's a pretty good analogy of how we travel through each day of our life, hoping, planning, and looking forward to what lies ahead. We make every effort to make it the best and most comfortable experience that we can for ourselves and our loved ones. We enjoy the present, and most of us seem to really love recalling what we refer to as the 'good old' days. That's the human experience we strive for. But, no matter how carefully we plan, no matter what our hopes and dreams for the future might be, as we travel life's road we are going to get caught by surprises along the way. We stumble across unexpected hardships, delays and problems in our lives.

One of those unexpected hardships is the death of a loved one. Most of us have been there, perhaps with a parent, family member, perhaps a close friend, or a child. No matter how much you think you are prepared, when it comes, we're never ready. No matter how much, or how little advance warning we may have it always stops us cold in our tracks. We have now come face to face with our own mortality...that realization is simply the fact that we are born to die.

In times like this we look deep into our faith and seek the meaning of hope in our lives. Death serves as a reminder that one day all the earthly trappings of this life will fall from our hands as we are called before our Lord who sits in judgment over all. We then have the opportunity to account for how we spent our life here on earth...now there is a sobering thought, indeed.

Bob didn't have much advance warning. This past June he was experiencing some back issues and pain, and wound up in the hospital ER on the 5th of July. From that point on it seemed that things just snowballed into a cancer diagnosis...then shortly after that, the word came...it was stage 4. Several weeks in the hospital, some rehab time, and then came the plan for radiation treatments and ultimately, chemo. All this new direction came without warning, and threw a monkey wrench into his life, and to that of Paige, as well. Following radiation, Bob decided, after one treatment, to forego the regimen of chemotherapy and have hospice care at home.

Robert Wales Carpenter, Jr., the oldest son of Robert W. Carpenter, Sr. and Dorothy Crossman, was born on December 8th of 1942 in Danbury Connecticut. He lived there for just 3 months when the family moved to Milton, Massachusetts. He lived with his maternal grandparents while his father served in WWII. At the end of the war, the family moved to Rockland, a small town a little Southeast of Boston, where Bob attended public school, and that would be his home for the next 11 years. In 1958 they moved to Berea, Ohio. Bob graduated from high school there, attended Bowling Green State University and earned his BS degree in Business Management in 1964. For 7 years Bob served the Bowling Green Police Department as a sworn police officer. Moving to Richmond, he held several enforcement and supervisory positions with the Department of Commerce, was an estimator with Natkin & Co, and worked as a fraud investigator for Capitol One.

He is survived by his bride of 30 years, Paige Rodwyn Keran Carpenter, sons Robert Wales Carpenter, III, Scott R. Carpenter (Amy), two grandchildren, Scott and Taylor Carpenter, Step-son Joshua Davis (Alexis), a brother James E. Carpenter (Brenda) and 2 nieces, Tonya & Leann.

Today we pause in the midst of our busy lives to catch our breath, because death has once again caught us by surprise. We pause in our own life journey to celebrate, remember, and now pay our last tribute of respect to Bob Carpenter, Jr. I first met Bob in late May of 1979 when he petitioned for membership in my Masonic Lodge. We hit it off from the first handshake. It was one of those moments when things just 'clicked', and we both knew this would be a good friendship. He meant many different things to those who are here today. To some, a father, a caring and devoted husband, a brother Mason and a good friend. I found him to be a man of great integrity and character, a man I am proud to call my Masonic Brother.

My Dad once told me that your path in life will cross the path of many thousands of people, and you will make a lot of 'acquaintances' in your lifetime, but the number of 'really good friends', the kind that you can count on to be there when you really need them...those 'really good friends' can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Bob was one of my really good friends in life.

When I first met Bob, he was a quiet and shy person. Learning our Masonic ritual brought him out of his shell, and he quickly became a confident speaker. He served as Worshipful Master of Tuckahoe Lodge in 1984, just one year before his father occupied the East. Bob served as Secretary of Tuckahoe Lodge for 35 years, and as General Secretary of the Scottish Rite Bodies in Richmond for the last 17 years.

As I prepared my thoughts for today, I looked over the list of his affiliations, achievements and awards, and it fills a full page...seriously, a full, single-spaced page of his journey within our Fraternity. In 1956 he took his first steps on the Masonic path as a member of the Order of DeMolay in Abington Massachusetts. The Masonic community has afforded him many awards and honors, including membership in Lodges in Massachusetts, British Columbia, and as an LMIP member of Tuckahoe Lodge. He served as District Deputy Grand Master in 2001, and our secretary since 1987. Bob was the first recipient of the J. Ned Culler Award for Masonic Excellence in 2011. He served the Grand Lodge on numerous committees during his Masonic career, and was our representative to the Grand Lodge of Ceara, Brazil. He was a member of Washington Royal Arch Chapter 3-9, Richmond Commandery No. 2, Knights of the Red Cross of Constantine, The Royal Order of Scotland, National Sojourners, the Eastern Star, and The Philalethes Society, to name just a few.

Bob proudly held the Grand Lodge of Virginia Silver ritual card since 2006, and for many years as Lodge Instructor of Work, helped Brethren keep the ritual of Masonry pure and unviolated for future generations. He was a member of several research Lodges where he continued to learn more about the history of our Gentle Craft. The Scottish Rite honored him with several decorations, including investiture as a KCCH. I remember well the excitement in his voice when he phoned to tell me that he was to be Coroneted a 33rd Degree Inspector General Honorary, the highest honorary degree in Scottish Rite Masonry. That was a milestone day for Bob, one of the proudest moments of his lifetime.

The York Rite and Shrine were also an integral part of his Masonic journey. He was a member of the Shrine's 'Million Dollar Band', and for many years was one of the mellow voices in the ACCA 'Chanters'. The list of accomplishments of this fine Mason is impressive, indeed. But Bob was not here to just gather accolades and awards, he was truly a devoted Mason...it was a major part of his life, a path he chose to travel. So much so, that one time, many years ago, my wife told me that she thought of Bob as a kind and gentle person, a devoted husband, and a 'Professional Mason'. It is indeed a sad day for all of us, and for Masonry, for we have lost Bob's incredible devotion, vast knowledge, and leadership of the Craft.

Whatever the nature of your relationship with Bob was, thank God today that your path in life crossed the one that he traveled. Give thanks for the privilege of knowing him and sharing life with him. Remember that each of your own experiences and memories of Bob is a gift from our creator, given to us as a blessing as we travel our pathway of life.

We have gathered today, not to seek answers to all those questions that we will never understand, especially where death is concerned, but to celebrate with Bob, for he is truly free at last. Yet for us here on earth death is really complicated thing. I believe it can be explained by a very simple thought... 'death is that narrow, starlit boundary between the companionship of yesterday, and the reunion of tomorrow'. Bob is now in the presence of his savior, and rejoicing with those of his family that have gone on before.

Brother Bob, as Masons we have met before,
Where the Tyler guards the Lodge room door.
We have all given the well-known sign,
That has bound our souls together with thine.
This evening you have given no sign or word,
And our hearts are very deeply stirred.
Now, for you, the Tyler angels await,
Near the Celestial Lodge room's mystic gate.

My brother, at last you take your final rest,
While we must meet the wild storm beset.
We'll continue to build through mist and night,
But you have seen the quenchless Light.
While we still hew the shapeless stone,
You have now bowed before His Throne.
We must still tread the checkered floor,
Yet you have passed through the golden door.

Rest well my friend and Brother, till we meet again.

At times like this, I look through books for the perfect words to offer in this time of celebration of Bob's life. Books don't carry those words I seek. But from my heart, I hope each one of you remembers a happier time when you interacted with Bob. Take those moments with you as you leave this place. And when in the shade of evening, as the sun paints the sky in the west, pause for just a few moments and remember him at his best.

Robert Wales Carpenter, Jr.
12/8/1942 – 10/21/22

