

Past Grand Historian "Takes Liberties"
By Warren A. Williams

On Mentoring

I am personally very pleased that the Grand Lodge of Vermont and our recent M.W. Grand Masters have been interested in this Masonic responsibility. Interested enough that General Orders were issued and effort expended regarding the seriousness of it. Worshipful Masters are to appoint a mentor for each candidate to assist in the understanding of the degrees. This has been great! I hope the effort will continue, but something troubles me.

Over my forty years of being a Master Mason I have witnessed some insightful, unusual, thrilling and emotional moments of Masonry in and outside of Lodge. Beginning several years ago I began questioning Grand Lodge Officers why brothers in our jurisdiction were not required to learn about the third degree lecture in the fashion of the previous degrees. It was explained that "in the old days" Masons were required to learn their third degree lecture before signing the bylaws of their Lodge. Many never completed and, as a result, thereby becoming lost to our fraternity. And, by definition, were never considered Master Masons "being able to travel and work as such." Hence, drop the requirement!

So I ask the question, how can we value and teach the morality (friendship, morality and Brotherly love, you remember?) aspect in Masonry if men miss this important chapter in their Masonic education? I felt so strong about this issue (perhaps it was due to my being raised in a foreign jurisdiction where the return of the third degree was expected) that I requested to a change in the system to allow for this inconsistency. Many will remember that this request was approved at our recent Grand Lodge session as an addition to the Masonic Code.

This addition now states, under Mentor System, under Article 17, §317.8 Initiation and Advancement (pg. 28 of the Book of Reports, and "Highlights of the 205th Annual Communication") "He shall also be taught, subsequent to his Master Mason degree, the lectures of such degree and its obligations. This, I feel, is one way we can make "good men better!" Allow me to continue with a few ideas about how this procedure might be implemented.

What's Missing?

Nowhere can be found suggestions how the Mentor, usually an experienced Master Mason and often a seasoned Past Master, should proceed. Historically, and from my own experience, the mentor works individually with a candidate in enough sessions so the ritual becomes intelligible. This practice differs from lodge to lodge however.

Some candidates get "a sense" of what the oath means. Others understand the obligation. Some know the difference. Many are able to learn the complete degree, old penalties and all. Others learn selected parts. I have heard candidates return both question and response alone in open lodge without a mentor present to assist.

As one travels to different lodges and distant jurisdictions he becomes familiar with different ritual, procedures, and practices. This is what makes Masonry so fascinating. But it is very disappointing to witness new brothers being shortchanged at this important step regarding their introduction into our fraternity. Now, let me explain: It is my contention that Masonry loses new and hopefully interested men at this crucial stage in their Masonic experience. No investment, no growth.

How is this Accomplished?

It has been said that the Mentor is the "cheerleader" for the candidate. This is true in every sense of the word. In order to keep the interest of the candidate at a high level; schedule a learning session together at least once a week. It can be at his or your home, or at the Masonic Hall. Location is not important as long as you both are able to concentrate undisturbed.

You will see that this relationship will grow to become more than just a simple student-teacher relationship. The mentor and candidate are forced to become "closer" as you work together--- as brothers should be.

This process reminds me of "Master teaching" practiced in our school systems. In order to attain as much advancement as possible, set goals and then work toward those objectives. With this expectation better results are achieved. A tried-and-true principle at work here is attributed to that great teacher Socrates who it was said sat on one end of a log--opposite the student and taught. A single candidate obtaining our undivided attention seems to be preferable (although more can easily be worked).

If the "black book" (Code Book spelled out fully) is available in your lodge, see that the Mentor uses it for instruction if needed. Prior to its availability I remember working with a candidate who stumped me on the meanings of "C", "P" and "T" in the "opening of the Lodge." R.W. Bro. David Cumming, a very knowledgeable and willing PM and PDDGM, was only a 'phone call away at the State Police Barracks in Waterbury and came to my aid. When I called to inquire he knew to what I referred and could immediately provide assistance. What a good and supportive feeling!

This recalls that portion of the first degree Charge: "to improve in Masonic

knowledge, converse with well-informed brethren. They will always be as ready to give, as you will to receive, instruction." I have found this so. This is another, and perhaps better, method of accomplishing our mentor job.

One example of an excellent ice breaker in the first session with your new candidate might be to discuss the badge of a Mason and the manner of wearing it, found in the EA booklet. Most candidates have read at least that far in that handbook. Then proceed into the lecture, limiting the reading to a page or two per session.

Constant encouragement is necessary. Have him repeat after you as often as you both feel comfortable until he can read the passages unassisted. The candidate can be reminded that this is no different for him than for "many a friend and fellow who has come before him." We should continue as far as the candidate can go! Many will accept the challenge to learn the entire catechism. To me, this is how interest is developed in Masonry.

The willingness to read and learn more about our ancient Craft, and to move forward accepting positions of responsibility within our lodges is the desirable outcome. By now you've recognized that this isn't a one or two session process! I consider this another place where "good men are made better."

At this point of learning where the comfort level is high, the reading of the additional degree lectures could be read for the candidate. This further amplifies the meaning of the various degrees.

Experience mentors know that good and thorough work on the EA degree leaves the succeeding lectures "a breeze" to master.

The Charge to the Mentor

To you, my Brother, who has been selected as a Mentor, congratulations. Feel honored! There really is no greater contribution to your Lodge and our fraternity than this. And, if you enjoy helping, and have not been asked for a while, volunteer.

When a candidate invests his time and energy with you in learning what his lecture is about, he may come to view it as "a way of life" rather than simple repetition to be found in a lodge room. He may see Masonry as something deeper, more meaningful and significant compared to some "men's club" he might have joined. This is how a man becomes aware of and appreciate the rich history and antiquity of this venerable international fraternity of which we are so

proud. It is THIS feeling that Masonry should attempt to inculcate! Good luck!

To Worshipful Masters

It is your responsibility to the new brother and Freemasonry to select knowledgeable and interested brothers to provide this all-important assistance. This is not simply the selecting of some brother who happens to be sitting in the lodge room a particular meeting, but one whom you feel will meet this responsibility and time commitment to share Masonic light and enthusiasm. Make your selection feel important, for the responsibility certainly is. This should be a win-win situation. Good luck!

In Conclusion

My final thought is to remember what we have learned from the symbolism of our EA: "the great and primary object of this degree is to symbolize that birth of intellectual light in the mind. The Entered Apprentice is the type of the unregenerate man, groping in moral and mental darkness, and seeking for the light which is to guide his steps and point him to the path which leads to duty and to Him who gives duty its reward." Let's go for it brothers!