

Why There's Confusion Among The Workmen

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It's great to be back home. Yes, you heard me correctly. It's great to be home again. You probably thought because I "talk funny" you didn't quite understand what I said.

My original trip to Virginia in 1952 was an all paid trip sponsored by the United States Army. In July of that year, during the Korean conflict, the U.S. Army transported me from Fort Devens, Massachusetts to Fort Eustis, Virginia. The weather was a little warmer than it is right now, and I have to tell you, it was one of the hottest trips I ever took.

It wasn't too long before I found out there was a language barrier. One syllable words were often said with two syllables, and *yes* became *yees*. In Maine, *yawl* is a boat. In Virginia, it's a contraction of *you all*.

I'll never forget my first three day pass to Richmond, and later going to a restaurant and not being served, because what I thought was hilarious, the waiter and the manager found it to be sacrilege to your General Robert E. Lee.

I was walking on Broad Street looking for a particular movie theater, and couldn't find it. I stopped a man who was approaching me and asked if he could tell me where that movie theater was. He looked at me, said something which was unintelligible to me. We stared at each other. I repeated the question and got the same response. We stood there staring at each other for a bit, and realized that we weren't speaking the same language. I was talking "Northern English" and he was talking "Southern English." We smiled at each other. I shrugged my shoulders, and we walked away.

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Around supper time we went into a very nice restaurant to eat. We sat down and looked around to see several nicely draped portraits of Confederate generals. On one wall there was one set of drapes where there was no portrait.

When the waiter arrived, I asked him if they were reserving that spot for a portrait of General Ulysses S. Grant? Angrily he asked us to leave and walked away. We never saw him again. Another man came to the table and I asked him if we could order. He also told us to leave. I explained we wanted to order and, if necessary, I'd be glad to talk to the manager. He told me he was the manager and no Yankee's comments about their Confederate generals would be tolerated. He went on to say that no one would ever consider hanging a portrait in that empty spot unless it was of another Confederate general, and it definitely would not be a portrait of General Grant.

He showed us to the door, and I learned another very important lesson about Virginia and how Confederate generals were revered. I also found that my friends were not at all happy with me for making such dumb remarks.

Following basic training, I was assigned as permanent personnel at Fort Eustis and began working in the battalion headquarters office. Soon enough I found the evenings to be very boring, so I enrolled at William and Mary to take night courses toward my Master's degree. Upon separation from Fort Eustis, I continued with my graduate work at William and Mary. I loved Williamsburg, and saw some of the most beautiful landscapes as I traveled through your magnificent state.

While studying at William and Mary, I took a part time job as a music teacher in grades one through eight. Again the language problem took hold. In an eighth grade class I was reading the roll and got no answer when I called "Lillian ..." I again said, "Lillian," and got no answer. Finishing the names, I asked, "Is there anyone here whose name I haven't called?"

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A tall, thin girl in the back of the room raised her hand and said in the sweetest Southern drawl, "Y'all didn't read mah name."

"What's your name?" I asked. She replied with what I heard as "Leon." I explained that "Leon" was not a girl's name, and I would appreciate her telling me her name.

She again said, "Leon." I emphatically said, "Leon is a boy's name, Please spell your name."

She looked at me angrily and began with her very sweet Southern drawl spelling, "L - i - l - l - a - n."

I immediately said, "That spells Lillian, not Leon."

To this she replied, "Yu da-amn yankees don't know how to talk right."

At that point I also realized that I was attending *Wiim & Mary*, and not "William and Mary" as I had always pronounced it. It was a lesson well learned since I stayed in *Williamsburg* for another five years.

As time went on I became a guide at Jamestown Plantation and Williamsburg, and planned to remain in my adopted state of Virginia. The reason that didn't happen was that my father began having heart trouble and I had to move closer to Maine. I always maintained that the Old Dominion was my adopted state until one of your Past Grand Masters, M: W: Hunter Jones, told me I couldn't be a Virginian unless I was born here. Well it's the same way in Maine. We have three categories for our Mainers. The first is the native, He has to be born in Maine to be a native. The second is the transplant. He was born elsewhere and settled in Maine, and the third is the tourist. He's known as people from away. There's a local humorist who says, "Just because the cat has kittens in the oven, that don't make them biscuits."

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It's interesting, though, that Masonry doesn't, and shouldn't, work that way; and I have found in my Masonic life that no matter where I travel, I'm always greeted as a Mason and as a brother should be treated. That's one of the marvelous aspects of Masonry that hasn't changed.

If a stranger asked you to define Masonry in a couple of sentences, could you do it? To be very honest with you, I couldn't because our beloved fraternity has so many wonderful points that it would be virtually impossible to capture the essence of Masonry in one or two sentences. It's like democracy and freedom. How do you define those two terms to a person who grew up in Nazi Germany or in an iron curtain country? Like democracy, Freemasonry has an essence that's in the true Mason. In a way he lives and breathes Masonry every day of his life. In some ways the tenets of Masonry are in a man before he becomes a Mason. He learned those from his parents as he was growing up. That's an interesting concept, isn't it?

There are men who are Masons in their heart who never joined the Craft and never belonged to a lodge. My father was one of those Men. My father came to America, like most immigrants, to have a better life and be able to earn a living that was not possible in his small village in Greece. Late in 1917 he joined the army because he believed that was the least he could do for America, the country that had given him what he could never have gotten in Greece. The other reason for joining the army was so that he could automatically become an American citizen, a dream he could also fulfill. When he came home from the service, he opened a small corner fruit store. He started his own business. Sam became well known by all the businessmen on Main Street. He worked hard, raised his family, was dedicated to his wife and children and always believed strongly in the country that gave him the privilege of being an American.

When he died, every store on Main Street closed for Sam's funeral. That was nice, even though I didn't fully understand why they did that. As time went on, I heard stories about my father and how he had helped people start their business: "If it hadn't been for your

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father, John, I wouldn't have had a pair of shoes to go to school"; "John, today I'd be blind if your father hadn't made arrangements with the doctor to decrease the bill because my father couldn't afford it, what my father couldn't pay, your father took care of."

Just the other day I was at a funeral for a lady my family had known for many years. Her son said to me, "John, did you know that if it hadn't been for your father, my father could not have had a funeral because we didn't have the money. Your father told my mother not to worry about a thing, to make the arrangements, to select a headstone and everything would be paid for. It was paid by your father." My father was never raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason, but he certainly was a Mason in his heart, because he so strongly believed in God and his country. He would never do anything wrong, cheat or defraud his fellow man.

One of the objectives in Masonry is to take good men and make them better. That statement in itself is certainly a noble endeavor. How do we know who is a good man? We generally find that out when an applicant submits his petition to the lodge. The Masons who signed his petition state through their signature that they know this man; they are recommending him and this makes him a good man. The application is read and goes to the committee of inquiry so the members of that committee can investigate the applicant. If they've done their job well, they'll sign the application and state they recommend him. If they've done their job well.

If you've been on a committee of inquiry for your lodge, you've probably witnessed something that's not unusual. One of the members may say to the others, "I know this man. We don't have to go talk to him and his family." So they sign the petition and it's read in the next stated meeting. The members vote according to the recommendation of the committee. That might work or it might not because the members who signed on blind faith are saying to the members that they can do the same.

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Then we have the problem and I frequently get calls like this of the member who wants to know why the lodge can't vote on the night the ballot is taken. I hear, "he's anxious and wants to join, but if we wait too long, we may lose him." My answer is simple and direct: "Well, then we lose him."

We are in an ancient organization, with landmarks that have been passed down to us from generation to generation. This is not to say that we should be stuck in the past, because if we are, we'll eliminate ourselves. We need to make the necessary adjustments that will make our organization viable and bring in young blood.

There are two considerations we must understand about this. We, the older Masons, have to direct the changes with the young Masons to understand how we operate. If we don't become part of the change, the change will take place without us. However, if the younger Masons believe, "Let's get rid of the old timers because they're stopping progress." then they're making a big mistake because they neglected to tap the experience and Masonic knowledge which is also necessary to survive.

Let me give you an analogy. I taught school for thirty-three years. In fact, I started my full time teaching career in Yorktown, Virginia. In the sixties and seventies a tremendous youth revolution spread throughout the country, and education caved in to allow the youth to make the changes without the benefit of the adults' help. We are still recovering from that dreadful time in our history. We have young people who can't write well enough to be understood. We have youth who can't do simple math. We have youth who can't express themselves logically. We have youth who can read but can't comprehend.

The youth of the sixties and seventies were running the schools with no background to do that. There was no leadership. There was chaos. That same chaos can happen to us. Change needs to come about. However, that change cannot be to eliminate the ritual or the learning process. If and when that happens we've watered down Masonry to the status of another club.

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Leadership is of the utmost importance and the leaders must have Masonic education to lead with concern and determination for his lodge and the Craft. I don't have to tell you the importance of leadership, because there's a man in this room who has written books about the topic. Brother Allen Roberts is a great resource and you have him right here.

A good athlete has to follow the rules and his coach. The coach doesn't say to his team, "Well, who wants to play quarterback? Let's see, John, do you want to play end? No, that's all right. What position do you want to play?" A winning coach is a man who understands his players and his objectives. He's in control and the team has to follow the rules.

The great artists and musicians in history knew what they wanted to produce, but they had to learn their craft first. Then the dedication and commitment they put into their education and work produced the masterpieces they gave all of us to enjoy. The balance of leadership is so delicate that the lack of experience in that role can destroy the leader. In today's society we want to be friends. A good leader soon learns that the decisions he makes may sometimes make his friends enemies. The leader has to be concerned with the good of the entire organization and know the fine line he has to walk.

One of our Grand Masters from Missouri, who was also one of our Presidents, knew exactly what he had to do for the good of the country. One of the ideas he brought out was quoted by Burke Davis, a Civil War author. Mr. Burke said, "There is one letter from former President Harry Truman, gently scolding me for my 'solecistic' reference to General Robert E. Lee simply as 'Robert Lee.' Mr. Truman added, reasonably enough, that 'since our genuine heroes are so rare, their reputations should be guarded' - an underlying theme in the creation of his great library in Missouri." A good leader must be held in high esteem, and good leaders have to nourish the respect the leadership requires.

Another example of how leadership can deteriorate, whether it's the Master of the lodge, a Grand Master, a teacher, or a parent is interestingly stated here:

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When people, devoured by the thirst for freedom, finds itself with bartenders who pour as much as they want, to the point of getting drunk, it happens that, if governments resist the increasingly demanding requests of the citizens, they are denounced as tyrants.

And it also occurs that a man who shows himself to be disciplined is defined as spineless; that the frightened father ends up treating his son as an equal, and has no respect, that the schoolmaster no longer scolds his pupils and is derided by them.

In this climate of freedom, and in the name of freedom, there is no consideration or respect for anyone. In so much permissiveness, a weed puts down its roots and grows: tyranny.

The above was written by Plato in the 5th century B.C. and interestingly enough, a framed duplicate was displayed in a lodge. We see more and more of the above statement in our freedoms because of the lack of leadership everywhere. The question then becomes, "Who runs the show? Who runs the Lodge?"

Anybody in the role of leadership is a good leader because he's educated. We must know Masonry and understand its objectives. We cannot allow this great fraternity to deteriorate to extinction because we don't know what we are about. Let me tell you two more stories that I believe depict the essence of Masonry.

When my wife, Dolly, and I were first going together about nine years ago, we'd attended concerts in Portland, Maine, and always, went to one of our favorite restaurants for dinner. One night there was a long waiting line. We knew we'd be late for the concert if we waited to get in, so Dolly suggested that I go get the car while she called another restaurant in the area where she could be sure we'd have dinner on time and not be late for the concert. As I approached the restaurant Dolly was coming out the door with another couple. I figured she was so outgoing she had found some friends and had asked them to join us for dinner. As she opened the front door to get in I heard her tell the

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couple to get in the back seat since they were going to the same restaurant we were headed for.

I drove for a few minutes. There were no introductions, so I leaned over and whispered to her, "Who are your friends?"

She said, "I don't know them. Since they were going to the same place we were, I thought it would save them time if they came with us."

"What????!!!" I said. "You don't know who these people are, we have two strangers in the back seat of my car and you don't know who they are!!!!!!?"

"No," she sweetly responded, "They seem like nice people."

Hiding my fear and anger, I decided to introduce myself and Dolly. To this the man responded, "I'm a Mason and have heard you speak on several occasions."

When he said, "I'm a Mason," that was all that was necessary to alleviate my concerns. We chatted and the four of us had a very pleasant dinner together.

And one final story that tells what Masonry is all about.

The first year I was elected Grand Secretary I received a call from a brother in the northern part of Maine. He explained his daughter, living in a small town in Arizona, was expecting her first child, hadn't been able to work for some months, and her husband had been laid off also. They were very short of funds and needed financial assistance. That was easily taken care of.

A short time later, that same Brother called and explained that that there had been some complications in the delivery, and the baby had taken to be taken to a larger hospital in

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Phoenix to be properly cared for. That was done, the baby was now fine, but his daughter couldn't get to Phoenix and the hospital wouldn't release the child to anyone but the parents. Her father called me again and explained the problem. This situation wouldn't be so easily resolved, I made several attempts to take care of the situation, but without success.

When I was Grand Master, I had been invited to a small country Lodge where the Maine Air National Guard was working the Master Mason Degree. In the degree team was General Park, Adjutant General of the National Guard in Maine. I was introduced to him but being a Sergeant in my army career, I still was awe struck talking to a General, even though he seemed like a nice enough man. After all, he was a Mason and we meet on the level.

On my way out of the lodge that evening, General Park said to me, "Let me know if there's ever anything I can do for you." Now, several years later I needed someone to transport a baby and its mother back home in Arizona. General Park's comment came to mind. Would he follow through? Well, it was worth a try.

That night I called his home and he was out. I left a message with his wife and asked her to have him return my call.

About ten o'clock that night General Park called and asked, "John, What can I do for you?"

I explained the problem and he replied, "Don't worry about a thing. I'll take care of it."

Two days later, he called again and told me the baby was home with the parents. He had some friends in the Arizona Air National Guard who knew some of the hospital people who were also Masons. The contact was made. The Brethren from the hospital drove to where the parents lived, transported them to Phoenix and drove them back home with

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their baby. That is what Masonry is all about! I would defy anyone who tried to tell me that Masons don't follow through on their obligations.

We are fortunate to be part of one of the greatest fraternities in the world. It's wonderful to know that no matter where we may travel we have brothers who will extend a helping hand when we need it. A part of one of my favorite charges says it all:

Brethren, we are about to quit this sacred retreat of friendship and virtue, to mix again with the world. Amidst its concerns and employments, forget not the duties which you have heard so frequently inculcated and so forcibly recommended in this lodge...

What a better place it would be, what a better world it would be, if we and others lived by the duties which we all have learned and heard so frequently in our lodges.