

Brethren:

I was at work in my office the other day and I came across an old list of members of I.L.A. Local 1654 of which I am a member. There are approximately 133 members shown in 10 gangs on the list. In those days, as is the case in the present time, our members were placed in gangs and dispatched to work on the ships as gangs. The total gang size would vary depending on the type of cargo handled on that particular day. However, each gang had a set number of men especially in the key positions such as foreman, winchman, signalman or hatchtender, dockman, lift-truck operator and key holdman.

However, the importance of the list that I am referring to is that although it was undated, the list was from the year 1966, the year that I was accepted into the union. My father had passed away a year earlier at a very young age, 53 years old. The membership, at the request of the President of the local, Peter had accepted me into the union without question. A nice gesture, which I believe, was more in honour of my father than myself. I was the only new member accepted to the local that year. Today, I am the last active member from that list.

In 1966, I was the youngest member of the local and would remain so until the next year when we admitted another 20-25 members of which a good friend of mine was younger than I was. At the time, we did not realize, my friend and I, that we would serve the local for many years as President and Business Agent, respectively. He recently stepped down as President of the local after many dedicated years of service to the local.

The other day we, our five man negotiating committee, were sitting across from our employers at the negotiating table and I was responding to some unpopular proposals that were presented by the companies through their representative, the President of the Maritime Employers Association.

For a few moments, my mind drifted back to when as a 20 year man, I attended my first meeting of my local and remembered how little I knew of what was going on and further how I was somewhat restricted to speak my mind in the presence of my elders. Over the years, I listened and learned and served in many positions on the executive.

Jumping back to the present, I was having a conversation with Richard, the President of our local. He mentioned that our negotiating team would be in trouble without my presence at the table. I replied that they would do just fine without me and I added that they have learned more about the everyday workings on the dock than what I could remember from my days working outside of the office. The point is that they have confidence in my ability to lead our local in the right direction. The important thing that I always remember is that each individual has valid points of view and adds to the collective efforts and strength of our team.

My brethren, many of you are members of more than one lodge and although you are regular attendees of this daylight lodge, you continue to be a regular member of your mother lodge.

Your positive input to that lodge is most important as the Worshipful Master, the officers and most importantly the newer members need your experience and expertise, to assist in guarding the landmarks as we so often say.

From my experience, a helping hand, a quiet reminder here and there goes much further than being overly critical. It has often been said, "Praise in public, Criticize in Private".

Remind your brethren that protocol in the banquet room must be practiced on a regular basis so it can be performed with ease and will become second nature.

In the lodge room, it is important to do the ritual work without open books and as the old saying goes "if you don't practice, it ain't going to happen".

On a lighter note, I attended a Grand Master's Reception and Dinner in Niagara Falls the other night and a brother in giving a toast told a variation of a joke that you might have heard before. *"A young Canadian Mason was walking along the beach and kicked a bottle. A genie appeared and said I have been in that bottle for a thousand years and I am so happy to be released, I will grant you one wish. The young Mason said I have always wanted to go to Hawaii but I am deathly afraid of flying and sailing. Could you please build me a bridge all the way from Canada to Hawaii? The genie thought for a while and finally said, that is impossible, maybe you can come up with another wish. The young fellow thought for a moment and said you know in lodge the Past Masters always sit on the sides and are very critical of the work being done. Could you please have them just sit and quietly enjoy the work of the evening? The genie thought for a few moments and he replied do you want two or four lanes on that bridge?"*

My brethren, each of you are needed and respected in your lodges. Your knowledge, experience and gentle guidance adds immensely to your lodge and to the Craft in general.

Brethren, thank you for your patience and your kind attention.