

Good Evening Brethren:

The night of my Initiation into Buchanan Lodge No. 550 is still very clear in my mind. Waiting out in the banquet room to be received into the Lodge, I remember wondering what had prompted me to express an interest in the Craft in the first place.

It was just a passing conversation with a terminal foreman at work talking about the little I knew about Masons and the little he knew about Masons. Neither of us were Masons. A few days later his brother came to see me at work. His brother and I had known each other for many years. He immediately mentioned to me that his brother, my co-worker, had mentioned to him that I had expressed an interest in Masonry.

As it turned out, he was a Mason as was another brother of his whom I knew. I would be surprised to find as time went by that there were many Masons around me in the workplace as well as in other areas of my social activities. As I had shown an interest in the Craft, my friend asked me if I was interested in applying for membership. Curiosity got the best of me and I said that I was. We filled out the application together and I signed it. Not many weeks after, my wife Alice and I received three Masons into our home and not too long after their visit I received a letter inviting me to the lodge on a particular evening at a designated hour.

There I was at the Hillcrest Masonic Hall on Concession Street wondering what the evening would hold for me. Following my Initiation Ceremony, I was directed to the head table with the Worshipful Master, his fellow officers and others who had been invited to the head table by the Worshipful Master. As I sat there being served a hot meal by members of the lodge who cheerfully attended to our every want, including dessert and then coffee and/or tea, I reflected on the events in the lodge room, the ceremony, the singing of beautiful verses by the brethren while being accompanied by the organist. I was deeply impressed and I must say, "hooked for life".

An added bonus was that during the banquet hour, I was treated like I was the most important person in the world. I enjoyed the various toasts and then when a brother of the lodge proposed a toast to me, I was surprised and even more surprised when the Worshipful Master asked me to respond to it. I did manage to express my thanks in a few broken sentences because my pride and gratitude of being there was overwhelming. I had never experienced such a fraternal atmosphere as I had that night.

The ritual work that I witnessed that night and on the nights to come when I received my further degrees left me in awe of the brethren that performed them. I thought of these brethren as scholars with the rich beautiful lectures that they recited to me. Their words flowed with elegance and great feeling. I am sure that each of us remembers their first visits to lodge. There were many Masons in those early years that impressed me but I will mention two at this time. The brethren that I first met in Buchanan Lodge had an immediate and lasting effect on me. V. W. Bro. Joe Hobson delivered some of the most beautiful and important lectures to me, as did R. W. Bro. Ralph Hurst. They are both now gone to the Grand Lodge Above but their memories and influence are still with me.

V. W. Bro. Hobson was an excellent ritualist and he delivered his lectures to the candidate as it was the most important duty of his whole life, at least that was my impression of this man. A person whom I immediately liked upon first seeing him. He was the Secretary of the Hamilton Masonic Districts' Board of Relief when I first met him. I had read in one of the pamphlets that you could make a donation to the Board of Relief in memory of a departed friend, brother or a family member. I did that on several occasions and V. W. Bro. Hobson would promptly send a letter of acknowledgement to the family of the deceased. On the night of our lodge elections, when the Worshipful Master called on nominations for a Representative to the Board of Relief, V. W. Bro. Hobson immediately stood up and nominated me. I accepted the nomination and have been involved since that time in the Board of Relief. I served a two-year term as President of the Board a few years ago.

How many of you remember R. W. Bro. Hurst when he would enter the lodge room and with a twinkle in his eye see you on the far side of the lodge and with his right hand make a little peace sign and place his hand on the back of his head like feathers on an eagle and grin away at you. From the very first time when I was given a little piece of work to do in lodge, Ralph never failed to come up to me afterward and say "Michael, you have taken to Masonry like a Duck takes to water". Every time he said that, my chest burst with pride and I was determined to do even better the next time. Not that many months before he passed away, Ralph was laying in his hospital bed when three or four of us went to visit him. He was sleeping when we walked in and so we were about to quietly back out the door when he slowly opened his eyes and cheerfully invited us to stay. He was very happy to see us and we spent an hour or more chatting away. By this time Ralph's body was ravished by his illness and he was not much more than skin and bones but his eyes were bright as he talked about his work in lodge and chapter. He quietly said that his biggest worry was that when he got back to lodge and back to his beloved chapter, he would probably have to do his lectures sitting in a chair. R. W. Bro. Ralph Hurst, District Deputy Grand Master of Hamilton Masonic District "C" in 1990-91 never really got much of an opportunity from that point on to continue to take part in his beloved craft. Earlier on October 1st, 1998, as Worshipful Master of Buchanan Lodge, I had the honour of taking part in the presentation of a Fifty (50) year jewel to Ralph and also Fifty (50) year jewels to four other members of Buchanan Lodge. What a great evening that was. Ralph passed away on April 13th, 1999, and many of us attended his funeral. Although saddened by his loss, each of us felt fortunate to have known such a gentle and kind man.

These two brethren and yes, there were many others that influenced me, but especially these two, showed me by their example, that there is so much to enjoy and love in our gentle craft.

Brethren, I would sincerely ask you to be ever mindful of the way you prepare yourself and participate in lodge and in the banquet room. Help to organize and then attend your practice nights, each of you do your work to the very best of your skill and ability. I suggest that the Worshipful Master be acutely aware of moving from event to event quickly and efficiently in the lodge room because arriving late in the Banquet Room is disaster knocking on the door. Yes, I understand on many nights it is easy to forego the toasts in the banquet room, but please make the extra effort and do them with style and perfection. Make it second nature to have a head table and depending on the hour, perform all of the formalities. Please make an effort to visit other lodges whenever your cable tow will permit and in turn, your lodge will be blessed with many visitors. If you do not have an organist in lodge, search for one and make sure you have him there for every meeting. Put the music sheets out at lodge and have the brethren sing. It adds so much to the ritual, especially during the degree work. Be deliberate in the performance of your duties in preparing the lodge and be careful to perform the ritual in accordance with the edicts of Grand Lodge. Help to carry the burden of the work associated with the lodge and banquet room. With many hands, these burdens will become light as a feather. Study the Book of the Work, the Officers' Manual and the up-to-date constitution of our Grand Lodge and all the other important writings that are available. The 2004 amended edition of the Grand Lodge Book of Constitution is now available at Grand Lodge. Please make the effort each and every night and your rewards will be immense.

Your members will show their gratitude by their regular presence in lodge. Your candidates for Masonry will certainly appreciate your efforts and years later when they serve as officers of the lodge, perhaps as the Worshipful Master or perhaps even as the District Deputy Grand Master of your District, they will look back and feel great warmth and thankfulness for your labours.

Brethren, thank you for your kind attention.