

**Official Visit to Meridian Lodge No. 687
February 12, 2014**

“My Greatest Fear is a Blessing in Disguise”.

First I would like to share with you a story of two Scotsmen I overheard speaking at a pub one night. While they were enjoying their pints of beer, one of them leaned into the other and said; “Did you hear that Randall McGuinness passed away the other day?” “Auch No” said the other Scott with what appeared to be genuine sympathy. So, the first Scott inquired “Are you going to be attending his funeral this Sunday?” After a moment, the other Scott put down his beer and stared his friend straight in the eye and said “Hell noo, he’s not coming to mine is he?”

I may not be a big fan of spiders and snakes and I would prefer not to step to the edge of a balcony of a tall building, but these are not things I fear the most. What I fear the most occurred on Saturday March 19th, 1988. It was a day that made a lasting impression and has had a significant bearing on how I have lived my life since that time. I am not sure it *changed* me in the truest sense of the word, but it gave me a greater perspective on my mortal existence.

If you are thinking I am referring to a near-death experience. You would be wrong.

On that particular Saturday in March, I sat in the family pew at Central Presbyterian Church in Hamilton to celebrate the life of a family member who had recently passed away. It was a beautiful day if I recall and the only thing missing, was other people. Of course there were very few close family members in attendance, but for the most part, the Church was virtually empty. What a shame that the life of this person was not being celebrated or acknowledged by more than a handful of people, most of which were family. How could this be?

What I can tell you is that the deceased was a very unhappy person and bitter about life in general. I do have a few fond memories of this individual, but for the most part she was miserable and this is what I tend to remember more. I suppose this might explain the rather poor attendance at the end of her days.

That day really shook me up. I thought to myself how sad it would be to live my life and have made so little an impact on the people around me that I had offered so little value worth remembering. I had dreams for months after that day which bordered on nightmares. There I was, sitting on a cloud looking down at my own funeral with only a few people in attendance. They had expressions of pity on their faces rather than happy reflections.

I believe I had been living my life up to that point as a happy and cheerful person, but that experience gave me a resolve to continue and do so.

Of course I have my good and my bad days as I am sure we all do, but I try to shake the negative feelings quickly and pursue such activities and associate with people to restore my positive balance.

I can only hope that when I am called from my earthly labours, I will have touched enough lives so as to be recognized as a life worth celebrating. To be worried about how people will think about me when I am gone is sort of like, posthumous narcissism. I suppose it is to a certain extent, but it does influence how I live in the present.

I hope it does not sound like I am trying to compete with the likes of Mother Theresa or Gandhi, because they had their own agenda. I simply hope to bring a little joy to whomever I meet. Wouldn't it be fantastic if everyone you met were a little better for having known you? Just like the hottest new product, you are in demand. You are recognized for your pleasing disposition and your talents. But unlike the 'next best thing' you are a treasure that will endure forever; dependable, confident, happy, productive and supportive.

When I set about to write this piece, there were three things that influenced the content and the tone of my message, a dear friend of my family and no stranger to Meridian Lodge, the late, M.W. Bro. Norman E. Byrne, Past Grand Master, the experience I have just related and a coin collection, which I will circulate amongst you shortly.

I suppose if you asked me to write about a fish, a bicycle and a yoyo I could tie them together also, so bear with me while I hope to make sense for you of my nightmare, a Past Grand Master and a coin collection.

History my brethren may either be kind or otherwise, depending on *how we write it*. I am not talking about how we account for what has already happened, but rather about what *will* happen and will consequently, be *our* history.

How will our history be written and how might we influence it while our day is still bright? When the unforgiving pen hits the paper, what is it that will be said about our lives? Will it be a generic tone of "*he was a nice guy*"? Or perhaps the other extreme of "*A pillar of our community and a considerate philanthropist*?" The point is it doesn't matter to me one way or another the history you chose...but it should matter to you because it is *your* history. I think every man should eulogize his life while he is still living. I have told my wife jokingly I would like the words "*Used Up*," inscribed on my headstone. I think it would be a testament to hopefully a productive life that gave all it could, and was thus, "Used Up". The more I think about it...the less I am kidding.

The reason I referenced M.W. Bro. Byrne in this presentation is because quite often we tend to find inspiration for living our lives from the greatness of others.

Perhaps there are those that might disagree or have different recollections, but I found Norm Byrne to be such an inspiration. Personally, I knew *Mr. Byrne* as I called him back then from the time I could crawl. He was a close personal friend of my fathers and I was accustomed to seeing him on the Ski Hills, cocktail parties and family gatherings. At that time I knew nothing of his Masonic connections. Early on, I witnessed and admired his keen eye for business, his leadership and sage advice. He was fair, and yet I am not sure I would call him gentle. His booming voice could bring the roof down and when he spoke, you could not help but hear him. He was supportive and yet very frank with his remarks.

When I ran for Grand Senior Warden many years ago, I remember M.W. Bro. Byrne taking me aside at Grand Lodge and saying: “Remember two things; don’t be disappointed and don’t take yourself too seriously”. As it turned out, that was very good advice. He wanted me to enjoy the experience and I believe he wanted me to take things in stride and be happy.

The long and short of it is M.W. Bro Byrne had a profound affect on his community, his friends, his profession and the Craft. His history has been written. It is favourable and memorable and I am quite sure it is as he intended.

As for the coins being circulated, these are sterling silver commemoratives of note-worthy Masons.

These brethren are men of greatness, men who have accomplished much and again are examples for our inspiration. Their history has also been written. I now offer you some insight into a few of these individuals.

Rudyard Kipling, author of the *Jungle Book* and many other works is regarded as a major "innovator in the art of the short story"; his children's books are enduring classics of children's literature; and his best works are said to exhibit "a versatile and luminous narrative gift". Kipling so loved his masonic experience that he memorialized its ideals in his famous poem, "The Mother Lodge", and used the fraternity and its symbols as vital plot devices in his novella, *The Man Who Would Be King*.

Henry Ford: He was an American industrialist, the founder of the Ford Motor Company, and sponsor of the development of the assembly line technique of mass production. When he received his 33rd Degree in 1940, he said, "Masonry is the best balance wheel the United States has".

Harold C. Lloyd: He was an American film actor and producer, most famous for his silent comedies. Harold Lloyd ranks alongside Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton as one of the most popular and influential film comedians of the silent film era. Lloyd made nearly 200 comedy films, both silent and "talkies", between 1914 and 1947. He remained involved in a number of other interests, including civic and charity

work.

Inspired by having overcome his own serious injuries and burns as a child, he was very active as a Freemason and Shriner with the Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children. He was a Past Potentate of Al-Malaikah Shrine in Los Angeles, and was eventually selected as Imperial Potentate of the Shriners of North America for the year 1949–50.

Far it be from me to suggest you need to ascend to Grand Master, write a novel, improve industrialization or be elected as the Imperial Potentate to justify a history worth being proud of. Each man whether young or old is '*never too old*' to write a new chapter of what will eventually be *his story*. You don't need a 'do-over' you just need a 'do-now'.

I said in the beginning my biggest fear has been a blessing in disguise. The fear of my life dissolving into obscurity and irrelevance because I fail to act and make a difference has been a constant reminder of the blessing to cherish each and every day of my life and make a difference while I am able.

I give thanks for the love of my wife Christina and family, the love of my friends and the sincere affection of my brethren.

Finally Brethren, may you find inspiration, happiness and may you be proud of the history you write.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Presented by:
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