

The New Mason – Unique and Imperfect
Presented April 12, 2016 at Seymour Lodge No. 272

Brethren, several years ago I had the honour of getting to know someone who left a great impression upon me as a person. This evening, I thought that I would expand upon my encounters with this man and by recounting these events, and that you may be able to take away some of the wisdom which I received from this experience.

The story begins in a small unassuming deli on King William Street in downtown Hamilton. From the outside this deli looks like any other friendly quiet deli, and for my purposes it suited just fine. You see, as a business person, I live within a very fast and demanding lifestyle. Because, for all of the little things that make up my day and demand my time, there are big decisions which cannot be taken lightly and which need careful contemplation and consideration. For this reason, and perhaps due to my farming and community roots, I chose this deli as the place where I would disconnect, disappear, and silently eat my lunch under the cover of anonymity.

The name of this special place was called Reardon's deli. The floors of this deli were worn and trodden from the rushing masses that would attend during the lunch hour. The walls were filled with black and white memories of past generations, and newspaper clippings proclaiming great milestones of years gone by, and a small group of dedicated smiles always greeted you when you arrived. But on the off hours, between the busy times, this place was just simply, quiet.

I began visiting Reardon's Deli here and there, and then quickly found myself visiting on a daily basis. Each day I would arrive and pick up a pencil and quickly circle and fill in the form which asked me about my sandwich. What kind of cheese, what kind of meats, what kind of bun and which kind of sauces, and then I'd take my seat, with a coffee, and then quietly eat in the back corner.

About three months after I started visiting, I went up to the cash register to pay and Paul Reardon the owner rang in my bill. But before handing me back my card he said, "You know, we really appreciate your business. It is so difficult to gain a customer like you, and to keep you. Thank you for coming back."

Well, as life would have it.. my cover was blown. All anonymity went out the window, and they learned my name. Soon they stopped asking me to fill out the papers.. because by this point I'd filled out the form every day for several months with the same selections, and Paul and I started to get to know each other.

One day while talking with Paul he told me that his family had started Reardon's deli as a Market Stall downtown in Hamilton Market in 1912 back when it was an open air market. People from all around would flock to the market each day to buy their meats from Paul's Grandfather. As the story goes, Paul's Grandfather one day saw a woman that caught his eye walking through the market. Being the shy type however he didn't approach her and just took note as she continued to visit the market quite often. It wasn't until sometime later that Paul's Grandfather mustered up the nerve to approach this woman and ask her out. Though, when the fateful day came she didn't appear. For three years his Grandfather looked through the crowds for her until one day she came wandering down the aisle. He then rushed out from behind the counter, and promptly asked her out. She had in the interim moved out west and was only back visiting family and had decided to drop by the old market. Those two later married and became Paul's grandparents.

I could go on, though these types of stories were commonplace with Paul. He had a knack of stories and learning about each one of his customers who came through the door. He knew their names, where they came from and most importantly he spent a lot of time learning what they liked, and he catered to

each one individually. As I sat in that deli I watched a master at his craft get to know his various customers. In fact, some customers, needed only to pull up with their cars out front, for Paul to begin making their order. One day, I remember the lady behind the counter quickly bagging up several sandwiches and then running out the door with them. I turned to Paul, and said "Paul? Where's she going?" Paul smiled and said, Devin the garbage men need to eat too..

Brethren, as I reflect back upon this year, one of the highlights for me has been meeting with new prospective applicants who have approached our Craft through our District Website. Each of these men is so very different though when it comes right down to it they are all searching for the same connection to something real, and something that moves them.

Each of these new members joins our Craft in the same way, and through the same door, and Freemasonry provides that value in return. I firmly believe that our organization has a great deal to provide these men, and as the saying commonly goes, what they put into the Craft, they receive back in return many times over.

We are currently experiencing a resurgence of new members joining Freemasonry today, though the numbers show that many of these new men are not keeping their membership beyond a couple of years after becoming Master Masons. There is no denying that the ability to keep these men engaged is well within our control and we need only consider our relationships with each of these men, to see where we went wrong. As our Lodges get busy, it is quite easy to become focused with organizing the next initiation or degree without a second thought to those who have already passed through. Some men will push and volunteer to become involved in these degrees. However the introverted members who don't, can quickly fade into the background and drop off. If it hasn't already become obvious through my actions at Reardon's deli, I personally am by nature an introvert, and I was very much one of these men who could easily have drifted into the background if it were not for a small handful of men.

While I was progressing through my degrees, I once sat with Wayne Elgie who took an interest in me just for a moment, and through our discussions he encouraged me and directed me toward new challenges. Gerald Somerville of Seymour Lodge here gave me a call and began inviting me out to Georgetown to visit among other Lodges, and the list increased from there as more men came to know me and in turn invite me to join them.

Paul Reardon had a knack for getting to know his customers, though I would say that he likely learned that skill from his father and his fathers' father. In Masonry we quite often take interest in new members but only after they have stuck out in our minds by virtue of some unexpected action or success. What we don't see however is that someone quietly took an interest in that man and encouraged him toward that action. That type of relationship isn't established by a mentorship chair or any other type of group program. It happens from one member to another, followed by taking a personal interest in the success of each other.

I encourage everyone in this room, including the new members present, to take a moment to notice the quiet new members in the background and make a concerted effort to get to know them, visit with them, but more importantly to learn what their interest is in Freemasonry and to fan that spark. We have a lot of bright lights joining our Craft, we need only notice them when they pass through our door, quiet, unique, and imperfect.

Thank you,

R.W. Bro. Devin Tuinstra
District Deputy Grand Master
Hamilton District C