

MASONS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

by Thomas W. Jackson Tom Jackson is the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. In this STB he shares with us several stories of Masonic involvement. Responding to the needs of others is a Masonic calling. It's important to know that the challenges of life are often met, mostly unrecognized, by Mason's practicing what we have been taught.

We at MSA are very grateful to Tom Jackson for sharing these stories with all Masons! Editor

During the 275-year history of organized Freemasonry, there have been countless stories of Freemasons' relationship with other Freemasons and Freemasons with others outside the Craft. Some of these stories have been told, but the vast majority are forever lost for lack of documentation. If these stories were known, they would provide far more credibility to the brotherhood of Freemasonry than would all of the attempts we make today to have not only the general public understand us but also to have our own Brothers understand us. I relate here a few.

A Truly Dedicated Mason

For over twelve years I have been listening to the difficulties in presenting Fifty-Year Masonic Service Emblems to Brothers who did not wish to make the effort to travel a few miles or even a few blocks to receive the award.

Several years ago I received a request from a good friend and Brother to present him with his Fifty-Year Masonic Service Emblem when he was eligible for one. With permission of the District Deputy Grand Master for his District, I readily accepted what I regarded as a rare privilege and an honor.

In 1991 I had the opportunity to make that presentation. My friend and Brother boarded a bus in Sedalia, Missouri (where he now lives) and traveled to Lebanon, Pennsylvania (the location of his Lodge) for a meeting in which he was recognized for his fifty years of service to our Masonic Fraternity. The next day he boarded a bus and returned to Missouri.

This in itself is an extremely remarkable act, far beyond what I have experienced before, by a Brother to receive this award. What is even more remarkable about the effort, however, is that this Brother traveled the distance with his seeing eye dog as his only companion, for this Brother is legally blind.

It must have been through efforts and interests of men like these that we have the privilege of being Freemasons today.

This Brother is a remarkable man. He is also a remarkable Freemason. I look forward each year to meeting with him in Washington, D.C. at the Allied Masonic Degree meetings which he never misses.

I cannot help but wonder how much greater we might be if we had more Brothers as dedicated to the Craft as is this Brother. He certainly has my admiration and respect and deserves the same from all Freemasons.

A Commitment to Masonic Caring

On January 13th of this year, I received a report from the Chairman of the Visitation Committee of one of our Lodges. Along with the report was a letter in which this Brother wrote: "Enclosed is the report of visitations for the year 1991. This is the 13th and final year of my visitations to the ill and shut-ins."

He went on then to discuss the locations in three States and five counties in the Jurisdiction of Pennsylvania to which he had journeyed in order to visit our Brethren who were in the hospital. He closed his communication with "I enjoyed doing visitations--Why--When I was ill with double pneumonia in January 1947 in the Norfolk Naval Hospital, the first person to visit me was a Mason from the Cape Charles, Va. Masonic Lodge. I have never forgotten that."

I have been receiving these annual reports from this Brother for a number of years. His are the only ones which I have received.

We, as Members of the Craft, can sit and lament the loss of the feeling of Brotherhood or we can, like this Brother, live Masonic Brotherhood. There is nothing I could add that would improve upon what he has done to maintain the image of our Craft.

Masons At Work In The Community

This past December, a telephone call was received by my office from the Department of Housing in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. A representative of that Department was calling regarding a lady for whom she was providing temporary shelter. This lady had been employed as a caretaker for an older and infirm person. She recently lost her position, and, although the Department of Housing was making arrangements to relocate her, she had no one to assist her and knew no one to ask for help.

She had told the representative of the Department of Housing that her deceased husband, who had been a Member of a Lodge in Oklahoma, had told her on a number of occasions that if she ever needed help to call the Masons. This was the reason for the call coming into my office.

I contacted the District Deputy Grand Master for that District who, in turn, made contact with the lady who needed help. After talking with her, he made arrangements with Members of a Subordinate Lodge in the District to meet on a specific date with pickup trucks and move her possessions to her new place of residence, a distance of approximately 60 miles.

The major significance of this action is not the participation of the Members of the Craft to help the widow of a Brother. This should always be the anticipated action. The comment from the lady from the Department of Housing was significant, however, when she said to me, "I did not realize that you people would do that."

Words That Made A Difference

"One Saturday afternoon, after working in my garden, I went indoors to lie on the bed and listen to a Penn State football game. The telephone rang, and the caller was a representative of the Women's Aid Society, calling room Texas. She told me that a young lady was on an airplane scheduled to land at the Philadelphia airport in one hour. Her sister, who lived in New Jersey, had been injured in an automobile accident, and she was arriving to take her home to Texas. She knew no one to contact and had no way to get to New Jersey. The only thing she could tell the Women's Aid Society was that, "her daddy was a Mason."

This lady called the Grand Lodge of Texas who referred her to my office. One of the employees who happened to be in the office on Saturday gave her my home telephone number.

I went to the airport and after a two-hour search was able to locate the young lady. I learned from a Brother Mason who was a security officer how to get to the small town in New Jersey. On the way there, the young lady told me that she needed to rent a truck to carry her sister's furniture and clothing to Texas. They wanted to leave the next day.

I was unable to rent a truck that late at night, however being close to the Delaware border I called the Grand Secretary of Delaware at his home. He in turn made arrangements for four Members of one of Delaware's Lodges to come over Sunday morning, rent a truck, load it and get the young ladies started for Texas. I stayed until 3 a.m. helping them pack their belongings in boxes which I was able to obtain from a local store.

It is not significant that I was involved or, for that matter, that any single person was involved in this episode. The individual is not important.

What is important is our feeling of the need to respond due to a Masonic obligation. What is important is that five words, "My daddy was a Mason," given to a non-Masonic organization in Texas precipitated a response that involved four states across a continent. What is important is that it reveals the continuing essence of Freemasonry, "The Brotherhood of Man."

As long as we, as individual Members, feel the need to respond to this assumed obligation, we carry on the proud tradition credited to the Craft. We justify our existence. We give reason for an interest by others. We really maintain a reason for being. If each Brother would express and respond to this motivation to practice this "essence"--what a giant step for our survival!"

VA Volunteers

If you never have guided the wheelchair Of a patient down the hall; Helped a man who has given his country Of his love, his health, his all If you never have sat with the ailing, Seen their pain

and sensed their fear, Then you cannot share in the feelings Of the VA Volunteer. Have you paced with the wife of a veteran And discussed the time of day? Tried diverting her mind for a moment As her husband passed away? Have you offered a shoulder to lean on and a Kleenex for a tear? It's all part of the life that's lived daily By the VA Volunteer. Sympathetically listening to memories Of a patient racked with pain; With a smile, cheerful word, and a handshake That evokes, "Please come again." If a patient has said, "Thank you kindly," It was music to the ear And the greatest payment in this world Of the VA Volunteer. If each one of us walked down those hallways With the volunteer one day, If each one gave a thought to the veterans And the price they've had to pay, Then our blessings we'd know to be countless, And we'd spend succeeding years Giving thanks unto God our Creator For those faithful volunteers.