

What does Masonry mean to me?

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An essay for Inner Quest Lodge #456

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To contemplate the question I must first admit that my love, passion and the ongoing understanding of our craft has been a process of evolution.

I was drawn to freemasonry by accident.

My introduction into Freemasonry happened because I asked to join the Shriners.

In 1966, at 10 years old, my dysfunctional mother and father gave up trying to raise my three brothers and I, one older and two younger. We were all sent to a Children's home in Bridgeton Missouri, near St Louis. The Missouri Baptist Children's Home Soon after, my two younger brothers were adopted and joined their new families.

One evening after our normal group supper my cottage mother summoned me to the dining room and placed a Sears and Roebuck catalog in front of me. She said to choose something I would like. A toy.... Clothes.... Anything...

She told me not to question it. Just do it. As I slowly thumbed through the catalog, flipping pages, I realized that the only thing that I wanted was to see my brothers again. I wanted my family to be together again. I was losing hope. As I slowly turned pages and found nothing I needed, or wanted. Out of frustration, I stopped at the musical instruments and chose what I thought was a toy guitar.

Months later, around the Christmas holidays, I was told to put on my best clothes and be ready for an outing. A school bus pulled up in front and I was loaded up, along with 10 or 20 other children, not knowing our destination. I was greeted by a man with a funny red hat and tassel. Each child was paired with a smiling and friendly red hatted man.

We traveled to a grand banquet room in downtown St Louis and as we were escorted in I noticed a whole room full of red hatted man. One was dressed as

Santa. A large pile of mostly wrapped presents were stacked neatly behind him on a stage.

One particular present caught my attention. It was unwrapped and had a big red bow. It was a shiny, beautiful and very real guitar. Although I hoped it was not, I knew that it was the one I pointed to that day in the dining room.

After supper, as Santa was calling out children's names and handing out surprisingly accurately chosen gifts to each boy and girl, I began to cry. Santa called my name as I expected and I walked slowly up to the stage to collect my prize, sobbing.

I realized that these red-hatted strangers had done something special that no other adult at the time seemed to do. They cared enough to want to bring some holiday cheer, just for me, from the heart. They also assumed that it was my dream to play the guitar. They wanted to bring a little joy to me at a time when I desperately needed it. The men did not know the real reason why I was crying or how long that I would remember their touching thoughtfulness and generosity.

I was at the children's home for about two years. My older brother and I were returned to Kansas City to my alcoholic mother and clueless father. My older brother left for the navy and I move out on my own when I was fifteen. I found my way through my teenage years and to adulthood by working hard and finishing high school. I met the love of my life, was married, and was blessed with two beautiful children. I vowed to become better than my parents. I was determined to become a stronger person than my mother and a then better man than my father.

What masonry means to me was forged in 1984.....

My wife, Vera, and I and our two young children were about to enter a department store near our home in Independence, Missouri. As we were walking in, I noticed a man sitting at a table at the front entrance wearing a funny red hat with as tassel. He was collecting donations to send children to the Circus. My thoughts raced back to when I was ten.

After dropping a few dollars in his can we began to talk. I found myself giving him a brief history of my connection to his group. He listened intently and then told me a little the Shriner's. I then asked him how I could become a Shriner and help children as I was helped. He told me about the Shriners connection to

Freemasonry. He then informed me that before I could join I would have to become a Freemason first and I would have a ways to travel.

When I petitioned my Missouri lodge, and was initiated, I was given a memorable first degree. I remember walking into the lodge building the very first time. The lodge was a true and fine example of a Masonic Temple.

It was like walking into a quiet church. The entry way floors were clean polished tile. The walls were all quality woodwork, floor to ceiling and hand laid stone on the North and South walls. The Lodge room seats were clean plush burgundy fabric and leather. The Lodge room was a Grand room with antique, recessed, indirect, lighting fixtures. The officers' stations seemed fit for royalty. There were pictures of past lodge leaders, with engraved brass plaques, lining the anteroom like proud soldiers immortalized like generals. My first impression was pure awe. The Officers wore tuxedos and the members wore suits and ties. I was greeted at the door by a true gentleman and introduced to each man there, one by one. They knew my name and my story. My future brothers knew that they only had one chance to make a first impression. This knowledge was vital for the future of their lodge. If they performed well, I would become a valuable asset to the lodge. These men had dressed up and pre-paired for me. They were focused on the important step I was about to take and made me feel at ease. I felt honored and important. I knew I was in for something special. I was the main event. There was no mention of the Shrine temple, which was within a mile from the lodge, or that most of the officers and members were Shiners. I inquired about becoming a Shriner and was fortunate to have asked a brother who understood the importance of Blue Lodge Masonry.

After being initiated ,passed and raised as a Master Mason I found the friendship, brotherhood and lessons of charity inculcated in blue lodge to be exactly what I needed in my life and what I was looking for. I found a place to help others, faith in the path I was on, confidence in my own abilities and something important that I had lost. I found a true and trusty brotherhood.

Brother John Evans, and my new brothers at East Gate Lodge #630 welcomed me into our craft and Freemasonry changed my life. I learned quickly and became a certified cardholder and coach for East Gate and helped bring many good men into our lodge.

After moving my family to Kansas, I became a dual member of Parker Lodge #341 in Parker, Kansas. I found that the brothers in Parker Lodge were equally good

men who were working to make themselves, their community and our world a better place. What they lacked in the decorum and solemnity that I was first introduced to in Missouri, they made up for in ritual knowledge. I must say here that Ritual is much harder to unlearn than it is to learn and I admit that some Missouri ritual is more explanatory, such as how we wear our aprons.

I helped to build our current Parker Lodge building and became involved in local governmental leadership on the Parker City Council and later became Mayor of Mayor of Parker in 2000-2002.

In 1991, I was elected and served as Worshipful Master of Parker Lodge and helped to connect our members, historically, to our community on the 100th Anniversary of our lodge, Chartered in 1891.

I was later elected as Lodge Secretary and held the position for 14 years.

In 2010 I was taking minutes during the official visit of our DDGM. He seemed to be giving a half-hearted and uninspiring report from our Grand Master and I began to wonder if he even wanted or even prepared himself for the important position he held. He confirmed my belief by asking our members if there was anyone in our lodge that would relieve him of his job in 2011, which he did not want. I suspected that there must be more information that our Grand Lodge leadership could share and I volunteered.

I was accepted and commissioned as DDGM in 2011 by MW Tracy Bloom.

After serving as DDGM for two years and ADGM for two years I realized that my personal blue lodge experience in Parker was not filling all my masonic needs. I heard of a book written by Andrew Hammer called "Observing the Craft", purchased it. It proved to be enlightening. His words touched my soul and convinced me that there could, and should, be more to our fraternity than pancake feeds and community service. He was also a Keynote speaker at the Leadership Academy in 2014.

My desire for a traditional, quality masonic experience pushed me to create a new Affinity Lodge made up of brothers who were also missing the masonic light we all crave. I realized that many of my fellow Area and District Deputies were looking for, as I was, a more respectful, traditional and observant lodge atmosphere.

This is the letter I sent in 2014 to past and current A/DDGMs to help form, and become charter members of Tuscan lodge #460 which was accepted as legitimate and chartered in 2015:

My Brothers,

Masons are always told that we are a fraternity of men striving to become leaders. We promise to help each in that pursuit. Many masons spend their entire Masonic career trying to become better fathers, brothers, husbands, friends, leaders and mentors. Many of us spend so much effort working our way through the offices of our lodges, leaning the ritual, mentoring and nurturing others to be better masons that we forget to find our own light in masonry. With all our focus on others we neglect our own needs for a better understanding masonry, its long history and the traditional observances of the craft.

We want a Masonic experience that we may never get in the lodges we were raised. Our home lodges and our brothers continue to, despite our efforts, refuse to bring an attitude of reverence, respect for our rituals or traditions or our history to our meetings.

We plead with our brothers to rebuild our temples. We plead with our brothers to learn the ritual. We plead with our brothers to take a leadership role in our lodges and promise to help them learn. Over the years some of us have come to the realization that a great number of our brothers want no more than an escape from home, a cup of coffee and a slice of pie.

Over time we learn that our Grand Lodge leaders have found a way to get a quality Masonic experience outside of their home lodges that extends the length of our state, and around the world. They have found what we are in pursuit of. They travel to other lodges in search of Masonic light in our leaders, not just in our projects. They work at learning ritual beyond the simple memorized text. They understand that, what always stands out, as a great lodge, is not its temple, it is its leaders.

I want to sit in a Lodge with other Masons that want more than just to escape the troubles of their own existence. I want to sit in a lodge with brothers that practice their ritual and come to lodge prepared. I want to be enlightened at every lodge meeting. What I have learned after more than thirty years in masonry is that our Area and District Deputies generally have strived for more light in our meetings. I want Masonic fellowship.

What I've observed in my fellow A/DDGMs is that they are in tuned to our Rituals. They are searching for a higher level of masonry that a Traditional Observant Lodge promises to deliver. They understand the importance of quality and attention to detail. By accepting the roll of an Area or District Deputy Grand Master, they have identified themselves as leaders that want more from masonry.

I will always work to bring more good men into the fraternity and help them realize their potential as masons and leaders. I am invested in Freemasonry. I hope to always be a good husband, a father, a friend, a brother, a teacher. I will always nurture and mentor new masons with excitement and enthusiasm.

I need Masonic education. I crave The Masonic experience. I believe that many of our brothers want the same things. My intent in forming Tuscan Lodge was not to exclude any mason who wants these same things. My intent was to bring those who have a passion for Masonic tradition, decorum, dignity, solemnity and respect together into one lodge. Men and Masons who can best work and best agree.....

In 2016, I was honored to be asked to join the Grand Lodge Advancing Leadership team and was elected by our Kansas brothers to lead Freemasonry in Kansas at the highest level. 2020 was a difficult and humbling experience but one that I will cherish forever.

My assumed role today, as a man and as a brother Mason, and for the rest of my life, is to set an example. I will pass our great fraternity on to the next generation of masonic leaders, pure and unchanged. I will encourage and mentor those who love Masonry and will offer my experience and knowledge to those who are charged to lead it into the future.

I promised to cheerfully conform to all the ancient established usages and customs of the fraternity.

I promised to observe my duties to god, country, my neighbors and myself.

I promised to practice charity.

I promised to be a true and trusty Mason.

I promised to keep my obligations to my brothers, and their families.

So.....My answer to the question...."What Masonry means to me" is all of the above.....Charity, Mentorship, Networking, Community, Leadership, Symbolism, Education, Ritual, Character and Quality.

But what Masonry means to me the most is a promise to live a moral and upright life and to set an example for my family, my community and my brothers.

Respectfully and Fraternaly

Brother, Tony Borum