

## The Aging World of Masonry

Presented to Chaudiere Lodge, October 27, 2009  
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One of the realities of the institution of Masonry in most recent years has been that many of our brethren are in or approaching their senior years. This is also true of the Shriners and other concordant bodies. Although I do not have the statistics on this, it takes but a look around many of our Lodge rooms to recognize this fact. And so goes my topic for this evening's presentation which deals with an issue of aging and the role we as seniors and Masons have to play in our society. And for those of you who may be more in that middle-aged or younger category, I am sure you too will be able to appreciate what will, God willing, be your future as the clock of time moves steadily forward.

Somebody once asked me how old I'd think I was if I didn't know my actual age. At the time I was in my mid-50s, and I believe I said I'd think I was about 35. Well, it is now about 10 years later and, if I were asked the same question, I'd come up with pretty much the same answer. Most days, at any rate.

As the years have gone by, I have noticed that newspapers are no longer using bold print and the print seems to be much smaller. I think the change relates to some economical concern the publisher has. After all, smaller type means they can print more words per page. If the trend continues, they will be able to print the entire newspaper on one page.

Another sign I have recently noticed is that stairs have become steeper. A couple of years ago I barely noticed them. However, a conspiracy is in the wind. Not only are they steeper but some unscrupulous person has added steps to all the stairs in my vicinity.

Is it me, or are people speaking much quieter than they used to? It is getting to the point that I had to program my answering machine with the greeting, "Excuse me, but could you repeat that!"

Then, the week seems to go by so much faster. I can remember when I was in school, the week just dragged on and on. I thought it would never end. Now, I no sooner get adjusted to Monday and its Friday already. Whatever happens to Tuesday through Thursday? Where do those days go?

I guess because I've been blessed with reasonably good health and am still able to curl and play golf, I don't really feel my age, unless, of course, early in the morning when I make that trek from the bedroom to the bathroom and happen to catch my reflection in the bathroom mirror. That can be a quick dose of reality and for each of us in those senior years, we do get our daily reminder of how old we are. For example, I have reached that age when everything has finally started to click -- my knees, elbows, neck...."

Now with all of these obvious physical shortcomings of the process of getting older, we tend towards thinking of all the things we will no longer be able to do or the things they will have to give up rather than the opportunities that lie ahead. Old age is not what it used to be as more and more Canadians are living longer and are enjoying good health and active lifestyles well into their 90's and beyond.

Experts on aging say that staying young can be as simple as using whatever talents or hobbies you are already passionate and excited about to teach, inspire or help others. Staying busy, whether that involves volunteering, learning a brand new skill or hobby, or enjoying a lifelong passion can ward off the loneliness, which is widespread among the older set and can minimize their quality of life. Staying fit and maintaining a healthy weight is another key to longevity.

Certainly those of you here tonight are testament to that solution. You have come out not only to show support to the Lodge but also to continue your participation in life. Here we do one of the best things we can do to remain young at heart. We socialize and maintain our connections with our friends and acquaintances.

We participate in the business of the day expressing our opinions on various issues that come before the Lodge. We undertake responsibilities necessary to making our Lodges vibrant and active. And yes, the Work of the Lodge. We continue to work that old grey matter by doing that which is the remedy for declining memory. We take part in the ritual. Our fraternity gives to us these opportunities to remain young in spirit.

Even though my stamina isn't what it used to be, even though my eyesight calls for three different lenses in my glasses, and even though my prostate has rendered the decision for more frequent visits to the bathroom, the one bright spot in all of this is that I have somehow become stronger than ever. There are special human qualities and abilities that can only come to full blossom with age. For example, mature wisdom, experienced leadership, the ability to give back to society the lessons and resources that have been harvested over a lifetime. We, the older generation, should be seen as a living bridge between yesterday, today and tomorrow. We are the prism through which others can see the rainbow of potential for the future. And the wonderment of it all is that our fraternity has been the fodder that has provided the nutrients from which all these things have been grown.

And so, you see, our generation of older folk are not just members of the local lawn bowling or bridge clubs. We are the tribal elders, with an ongoing responsibility for safeguarding the higher standards by which we want our society to live.

Masonry teaches us this throughout the three degrees. It is important to understand that you who are in your 60s, 70s, 80s, or 90s have the advantage of the experience necessary to apply the instructions so clearly stated in our ritual and thereby exemplify our standards as Masons to the world. In the first degree, "you will be taught the important duty you owe to your neighbour by relieving his distresses, by soothing his afflictions and by doing to him as in similar cases you would wish he should do unto you." In the second degree, "you are to supply the wants and relieve the necessities of brethren and fellows to the utmost of your power and ability, and on no account wrong them or see them wronged, but apprise them of approaching danger, and view their interests as inseparable from your own." In the third degree, "To improve the morals and correct the manners of men in society ought to be your constant care. You are to inculcate universal

benevolence, and by the regularity of your behaviour afford the best example for the conduct of others.”

And so brethren, to those of us who are older and those who are coming along behind, your age is your asset and you will forever remain a teacher, a facilitator, a vibrant contributor and an example to the lessons which Masonry teaches us even long after you are gone. Hold on to those lessons, brethren, for they comprise the barrier between right and wrong and it is your task to build that barrier high and strong.