

Individualism And Involvement

By William S. Broomfield

Brother Broomfield has served in the United States House of Representatives for 33 years and is currently Vice Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. For 9 years prior to this he was elected to the Michigan state legislature. A member of Lodge No 536 in Berkley, Michigan, he was coroneted an Inspector General Honorary in 1986 by the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction.

When I was a boy, there were two very successful businessmen in my hometown. Each worked hard and was well known in the community. As you might expect, each wore the Square and Compasses on his lapel. But unfortunately, this is where the similarities ended!

One man had a reputation for his friendly disposition. Going into his store was a pleasure as there was never any pressure as you browsed. If you happened to buy something that was not quite right, your money was refunded gladly. To this man the individual was more important than the product.

In contrast, going into the other man's store was not as much fun. He was friendly only when the cash register rang, giving a feeling that customer satisfaction was secondary to profit.

The impression that these men left on me is vivid today as I think of Freemasonry and its role in the future. Similarly, I have tried to recall my dealings with the many other Brethren I have met. My conclusion is that our actions speak not only for ourselves but for the organization to which we belong. Others, who know little about our fraternity, judge Freemasonry by our actions not our words.

Most Masons are good men. Most are sincere, honest, forthright and want to contribute to the world. More than the members of many other social and business groups, Masons want to be involved citizens who preserve the values that made America great.

This point has become more apparent to me as I reflect upon my association with one man in particular who represents the best that a Mason could be. Throughout his life he has read, observed and thought. When he has something to say it is worthwhile. Many of the current trends of society bother him, not because they are different from years ago but because something crucial is missing. As he often described to me, the problem is the decreasing emphasis on the individual and the increasing trend to follow the pact of mediocrity.

Conformity, he feels, has become the norm while those with a strong conviction of ideas have become lost.

Has the individualism that was common in America been sacrificed to the whims of those who market fast food and designer clothing, provide meaningless entertainment and promote materially oriented advertising? Have the values of honesty, hard work and independent thinking been replaced with profit margins, laziness and mindless decadence? I do not think so but such could be the case if we do not become involved in the future of our country.

Freemasonry promotes the dignity of the individual. It encourages freedom and will not tolerate those who want to shackle humanity either physically, spiritually or emotionally. The time is now for us to apply the tenets of our Craft. Through vision of purpose, we must succeed where men of weaker stature may fail. We must show by example that we do not live in an era where the individual is judged by the superficial standards of materialism. We can set the example as we maintain our standards and assess others on the basis of their character and ability.

Corresponding to the diminishing role of the individual is the concept that the collective good of society is achieved through compromise. But does this mean that there is no room for individualism? If so, then there will be a lack of creative thinking which will result in meaningless compromise.

When properly applied collective efforts can be tremendous. Throughout history such has been the case. Consider, for example, the 1960's when we harnessed the talents of our scientists and engineers to place a man on the moon. Continuing since then team efforts have produced technological and medical advances that have improved the quality of everyday living. I do not support abolishing the group approach but I encourage a constant infusion of fresh ideas into the process. Individual thought must prevail. Individuals with strong convictions become leaders whose vision ultimately benefits present and future generations. And this is where we, as Masons, must become involved.

Each of us must participate in the decision making process. At all levels, but especially at the local one, we should serve on committees to provide constructive input. Similarly, our Lodges can become activist in nature by honoring outstanding students, citizens and leaders who work to build a better tomorrow. We must no longer talk about the problems but become catalysts for solution. Too often we observe change for the sake of change. Now is the time for change that will do the most good. The future is too important for us to let others prepare the blueprints. If we are indeed the architects of ideas then let's apply them. It is not easy to become involved; time must be sacrificed. But then, nothing worthwhile is accomplished without work.

Having had the honor to serve in the United States Congress for over three decades this experience has taught me the importance of sound policy. As I attempt to view the future through the vision of today, I think it is crucial for good people to provide their ideas. Masons

are a cadre of individuals, rich with experience, who can offer much. Do not be afraid to become involved. To paraphrase an old saying: "One man with courage makes a majority."

There are those among us who feel that Freemasonry has served its useful purpose and is now an organization with a dwindling membership. But such a perception does not have to exist. For over two centuries, our Fraternity has survived various social climates. And throughout this time our value has been measured by the character of our members not by quantity. Why should there be any difference today? As long as good men wear the Square and Compasses, our respect in the community will not diminish.

My Masonic heritage dates back to my great-grandfather and great, great uncle who moved to Michigan from the east coast in the 1820's. They were men of strong conviction who helped to establish one of the early Lodges in the then Michigan wilderness. During the time of the anti-Masonic movement they kept the light burning. Literally, this was the case as my great, great-uncle would hold Lodge in his home on the night of a stated communication even though few attended. His tenacity paid off! Times changed and the Lodge prospered. So to the six generations of Broomfields, who have become Master Masons, the convictions of the individual have a strong root. This is just one example of how individualism kept alive has an impact on tomorrow.

The author, Jonathan Swift, once wrote: "Although men are accused of not knowing their own weakness, yet perhaps, as few know their own strength. It is in men, as in soil, where sometimes there is a vein of gold that the owner knows not of." Each of us should search deep inside for our strengths and find the way to best contribute these to others. Thus, Freemasonry will be judged by what we do and each member will be remembered for what he did.

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