

Why I Became A Mason

By Stewart M. L. Pollard

Stewart M. L. Pollard is a member of Ralph J. Pollard Lodge # 217 Orrington Maine and served the Masonic Service Association as its Executive Secretary from 1977-87. Stew shares many stories of "why" men have become Masons. MSA would encourage Lodges to use this STB as a program and ask the Brothers present to tell their story too!! – Editor

Prior to his initiation, a candidate is asked pertinent questions relative to his motivation in seeking the privileges of Masonry and is asked to give assurances that his decision was not influenced by mercenary motives. However, he is not asked to be specific as to what actually influenced him to become a Mason. It is not until we listen to the ritualistic exchange between the Worshipful Master and the Senior Warden that we hear the question "what induced you to become a Master Mason?" The ritual answer to that question is familiar to all of us.

The Master of a Virginia Lodge a few years ago received word just as he was about to Open his lodge that his guest speaker for the evening had been rushed to the hospital moments before. Undaunted, he opened the lodge, conducted the necessary business, and then announced the alternative program for the evening. "What induced YOU to become a Mason?" he asked. After allowing the brethren to think about it for a few minutes, he called upon several brethren to give their answers. It seems that each of us have vivid memories of when, where and why we made the decision to apply for membership in the world's largest and oldest fraternal organization.

This paper was inspired by the answers given on that night. Since then, all over the country, that question has been posed to many brethren. The responses have been fascinating, inspiring and interesting. Basically, the responses fall into several general categories:

Example set by family and friends
Urging of wives, mothers or sweethearts
DeMolay activities
Impressive Masonic funerals
Masonic Charities
Curiosity

Surprisingly, the number who indicated that they joined just so they could get into one of the appendant bodies, or who acknowledged that they were ASKED to join, were so few that it appears not to be a major factor. One Grand Master confided that when he proposed to his wife, one of the stipulations she made before she would agree to marry him was that he would have to petition a Masonic Lodge. (She was active in Job's Daughters.)

R.W. Brother "Jack" Kelly, Past Grand Master of Texas, recalls that when he was a small boy in Indiana he was recuperating from pneumonia at the time that his grandfather died. He remembers being wide-eyed when the house seemed to be filled with men wearing funny hats with white feathers on them and carrying swords. He was told that they were Knights Templar and were there to conduct Grandpa's funeral. He also has fond memories of the kindnesses and concern the men had for him. When it was explained that his grandfather had been the Commander of the Knights Templar and the men were there because of their love of his grandfather it made a great and lasting impression upon him. One of his most cherished possessions is the engraved Templar sword which had been his grandfather's. He claims that that early exposure to Masonic brotherhood was a great influence on his desire to become a Mason. A surprising number of brethren informed me that they were Masons as a result of the urging of their children, who were anxious to join one of the youth groups, and many of them expressed how surprised they were when they learned that other close family members or business associates were sitting on the sidelines when they were raised. Had they known that these family members or friends were members of the fraternity they would have petitioned sooner. This points up the fact that we tend to carry Masonic "secrecy" too far when we fail to talk about our Masonic activities to our friends and family.

A young Junior Warden of a Wyoming Lodge, approached me at a Grand Lodge of Wyoming Annual Communication and announced that he was a Master Mason as a result of an M.S.A. Short Talk Bulletin. When asked to explain, he said that he had come home from work one day and his father passed him a copy of the Short Talk Bulletin, suggesting that he read it. That evening he did read the bulletin and the following morning asked his father for a petition. As a matter of curiosity, I asked him if he recalled the title of that Short Talk Bulletin. It turned out that it was a bulletin I had written several years before, entitled, "Dear Son". I hope his father knows how proud I am to have assisted in being an influence.

A District Inspector in the Grand Lodge of Maryland is quick to explain that he was influenced to become a Mason by the example set by Past Grand Master William Jacobs of the District of Columbia, who many years before had been the Dad Advisor of his DeMolay Chapter. "I wanted to be just like Dad Jacobs, who so willingly gave of himself to every boy in the Chapter. If Dad Jacobs was a Mason, then I wanted to be one! What an example he was to us!"

Ed Rose, former Director of the Veterans Administration Voluntary Services Division, tells his fascinating story related by his Grandmother when he was growing up. It seems that she and his grandfather had gone to Arkansas from their home in Virginia for a vacation. While there, his grandfather became gravely ill and passed away. His grandmother was at wits end. She wanted to take the body back to Virginia for burial in the family plot, but she had no funds until she could get back. Fortunately, the Coroner learned that her husband was a Mason, and contacted the local Arkansas lodge. Almost immediately, members of the lodge were there to comfort and console her and to offer assistance. Within a few hours, they had made arrangements for the

body to be shipped to Virginia by train and she was provided with a train ticket to accompany the body. Members of that lodge also traveled with her until they were met by members of her husband's lodge. She quickly went to the bank and withdrew funds so she could repay them, but those who had accompanied her could not be located. She told that story over and over again to her grandchildren, emphasizing that that was the kind of men they should try to be. Ed likes to tell that he made the decision to be a Mason when he was eight years old. Isn't it great to know that there are men of that stature in our government!

Ill. Bro. Joseph R. ("Jose") Gilbert, 33ø, a Pennsylvania Mason living in New Jersey gave this reply when asked what had induced him to become a Mason. "Without the 'builtin ' advantage of having my Dad or brother as members of the Craft, I made my decision to petition a lodge for membership only after much thought and some years of decision. I did my best to find things I did not like about Freemasonry and found that I was wasting my time; there was no such thing! Every man I saw with that pin on, every man I called a dear friend who wore the Square and Compasses, every man I met in business, at church, socially . . . all were of a purpose, a principle, a way of life . . . that I felt a kinship with. I felt quite sure, even before I submitted my petition, that the men I assumed to be Masons as I went through life, were an accurate representation of what I would find if I were fortunate enough to be accepted. That was over forty years ago and I have no reason to think otherwise since that night I was raised. I thank God for that!"

In the January 1989 issue of The Virginia Masonic Herald, there was an open letter from a newly raised brother (Bro. Michael Stairs of Willis V. Fentress Lodge #296 Virginia Beach, VA.) As his letter so graphically explains his motivations in joining the fraternity, generous extracts from his letter follow:

* * *

"Several years ago I met and married a young woman who would turn my life around in ways neither she nor I expected. You see she is the daughter of a Master Mason. I knew very little about Freemasonry then, but the more I became acquainted with her father the better my perception of Freemasonry became. My respect for this man has grown to immense proportions. He is a good man, an honest man, a man of virtue and integrity, a spiritual man; a man that will go out of his way to do what he feels in his heart is right; a man that can't be swayed by the evils of the world and a man of immeasurable character and pride. The more I got to know this man the more I began to think to myself that there must be something to Freemasonry.

Several years after I married, I approached my father-in-law and asked him how I could become a Mason . He said, "All you have to do is ask." I did and soon thereafter, I was initiated into the mysteries of Freemasonry. This was the first step towards what have been some of the richest, greatest, and most profound expericnces of my life."

* * *

To avoid him any embarrassment, we won't identify the brother who confided that his original motivation to join the Craft was because he thought it would be "good for business." He had noticed that a number of men who were in the same line of work were Masons, and that maybe he could gain some advantage if he were to become one. As he progressed through the degrees he realized how wrong he had been. One of his business competitors served as his mentor as he learned his catechisms and became one of his closest friends. On the night that he was raised he was amazed to find his father, his father-in-law and two of his uncles had flown in just to be with him on that "special milestone" in his life. It was then that he fully realized how wrong his initial motivation had been.

Think about it! What induced YOU to petition for the degrees? Think about the Masons who have influenced your life, and your way of thinking.

We thought that the poem "I See You've Traveled Some" (on page 8) would be a nice way to end this STB. We do not know the author but the poem is in our file here at M.S.A. Editor

I See You've Traveled Some

Wherever you may chance to be
Wherever you may roam
Far away in foreign lands,
Or just at Home, Sweet Home;
It always gives you pleasure.
It makes your heart strings hum
Just to hear the words of cheer –
"I see you've traveled some."

When you get the brother's greeting,
And he takes you by the hand,
It thrills you with a feeling
That you cannot understand.
You feel that bond of brotherhood
That tie that's sure to come
When you hear him say in a friendly way,
"I see you've traveled some."

And if you are a stranger
In strange lands all alone,
If fate has left you stranded –
Dead broke and far from home,
It thrills you makes you dumb,

When he says, with a grip of fellowship,
"I see you've traveled some."

And when your final summons comes,
To take a last long trip,
Adorned with Lambskin Apron White
And gems of fellowship;
The tiler at the Golden Gate,
With square and rule and plumb
Will size up your pin, and say,
"Walk in – I see you've traveled some."

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