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WHY FREEMASONRY IS IMPORTANT TO MEN

Men, from time immemorial, have enjoyed each other's company, whether working in the fields or factories, drinking beer or scotch in the pubs, fighting on the battlefield or competing at the Olympian contests, fishing, golfing or hunting together.

Have you noticed that men act differently when they socialize together, without women around? Put one woman (even a not very attractive one) in a room full of men and notice the behavior dynamics change. Put a very attractive one in the room and they get louder, posturing and competing

This isn't just about testosterone – it is a social phenomenon. However, men do seem to love to “close off the world” and retreat to their “man caves” – no disrespect to our women who act the same way when no men are around – it's just that we are wired that way. The enjoyment of quietude, contemplation, reading, listening to our favourite music or just talking to alleviate the pressures of the workaday world.

In my four years at Dental School at McGill, the class of '76 didn't have one female student in the group! And yes, we were rowdy and to up to shenanigans that would never have happened if even one female student had been in the class.

Well, our Masonic Lodges are sort of like “man caves” and the ageless ritual and the beautiful words within the temple assuage our everyday worries and, like a mantra, allows us to focus on our spiritual center in a timeless state of being which rejuvenates us.

The roles of men in society have changed from past eras, where boys apprenticed to their fathers, uncles, grandfathers and, in doing so, they learned a trade or skill but, even more importantly, they learned how to be men and how to deal with other men in society. Today's men help at home, cleaning, cooking, helping the kids with homework, driving them to

multiple activities etc. as well as working in the very competitive work market, often travelling across the world for their jobs, trying to keep fit, and also having a social life.

Those apprenticing days are mostly gone in the Western world and even the number of male teachers is rapidly declining. The number of single parent families had drastically increased in the last fifty years and most of those families are led by mothers who do their best to raise their sons but they are not dads.

Boys and girls from such families miss out on male role modeling and studies show that they are more likely to have problems at school, more likely to suffer from low self-esteem and are more likely to end up with substance abuse issues or even end up in prison.

Who do they look up to for advice, support and life skills when the media portray dads as moronic dolts who act like adolescents, are pitiful and immature - shows like “The Simpsons”, “Everyone Loves Raymond”, “Tool Time”. We have Presidents groping women, lying, cheating politicians, doping , a sports celebrity even being videotaped beating his wife in an elevator.

So where can young men go to be mentored in life skills in a safe environment by genuine, caring men?

Not in the workplace which is hugely competitive generally or in a school where bullying exists.

Masonry is a natural fit and it has attracted men for centuries for these very reasons.

I was one of those young men with an abusive, schizophrenic, manic depressive, alcoholic step father. He taught me how to hunt and fish, but that was it! – full stop!

As a Governor in Rotary, I learned a lot about people and the world but very little about being a man. Masonry, on the other hand, has helped me to be a better husband, father and yes, a better man.

When young men join Masonry, they automatically observe and begin to emulate gentlemanly behavior and this has a powerful ripple effect on their families, loved ones, friends and workplace colleagues.

Because of the emergence of feminism and the very necessary improvement of women's rights, a collateral damage victim has been our very masculinity.

I don't believe any of you would today consider it un-masculine to change your baby's diapers, look after your children when your wife is at work or away or make dinner for the family. Our grandfathers would most likely be turning over in their graves!!

Most of us come from an era where we were taught to hide our emotions, "buck it up", "stiff upper lip" and don't cry, don't be a sissy!

To quote Robert Blye from his book about men "Iron John": "The grief of men has been increasing steadily since the start of the Industrial Revolution and has reached a depth that cannot be ignored.

The dark side of men is clear. Their mad exploitation of earth resources, devaluation and intimidation of women and obsession with tribal warfare is undeniable.

We have defective mythologies that ignore masculine depths of feeling, assign men a place in the sky instead of earth, teach obedience to the wrong powers, want to keep men as boys and entangle men and women in systems of industrial domination that exclude both matriarchy and patriarchy".

We have men undergoing adolescence for longer and longer into their 30's and 40's even, due to loss of jobs, living at home with mom and dad longer – sometimes due to failed relationships. They are what Blye calls "soft young men" who will do anything to please a prospective mate who essentially becomes a surrogate mother, while the woman just wants a real man, not a sycophant.

Initiation rites of passage are pretty well gone with young men thinking that binge drinking, drugs, fighting, fast cars are rites of passage to manhood because they experience symbolic brushes with death. They

return to these experiences over and over, attempting to achieve the same “high”, figuratively experiencing the death of their childhood – which inevitably results in addiction and sometimes a real death.

They are confused by the ancient mythologies such as the Greeks where men and women possessed all four of the elements – earth, wind, fire and water. Both women and men could be warriors, hard and healers/nurturers at the same time.

Then the Romans came along and bastardized this by having men possessing elements of air and fire – warriors and women possessing earth and water, soft, healing mothering.

Well, men today are not either/or. They are both and need to be aware of that fact to be proud as a man, a good man, and a good mason.

“From this day to the ending of the world, but we in it shall be remembered – we few, we happy few, we band of brothers; for he today that sheds his blood with me, shall be my brother”.

William Shakespeare from “Henry V”

As the Grand Master says, “be proud of who you are, be proud of what you do, be proud to be a Mason” .

So let us go out into “that dark night” not quietly, but loudly proclaim who we are, what we are and why we are Masons, both warriors and good nurturing men.

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