

Grand Orator Stephen A. Johnson's Grand Oration Sometime back in the springtime.

A few years ago my dad passed away at the age of 85, he died from complications of cancer and we laid him to rest in the springtime. I remember my Dad as being a resourceful man who had been one of the many who endured the great depression. As a kid, about 10 years old, I was playing in the back yard when my Dad pulled up in the family station wagon and said he had something for me. Inside the back of the station wagon he pulled out the wreckage of a bicycle he salvaged from the junk yard he had visited while helping a neighbor haul a load. He told me he going to fix it up and then I would have my own bike.

My dad was a letter carrier and also worked part time in a machine shop nearby in our little town of Richfield, Minnesota. Dad would go into the shop each night and work on that bike with all the free time he could afford, which was hard due to the fact that Mom was laid up at home after surgery and money was tight. Unlike other kids who where getting store bought Sting Ray bikes, I was getting one second hand. One day Dad came home and with a great smile and pleasure he pulled out this wonderful Schwinn bicycle which he had totally restored! It was like brand new. Bright cherry red finish and a nice black leather seat, three speeds, chrome fender and new fat tires. It was the best gift ever received.

Us kids in the neighborhood would have what we called a bike hike throughout the summer. Our Mom would pack us a lunch and we would get our Dads W.W.II combat stuff like canteens, back packs and load up our bikes and pedal off to some place to explore. My favorite place was down at the ferry bridge on the Minnesota river near the old Masonic Home on Normandale Boulevard. On our five mile trek we would stop at the Masonic Home and rest under the shade trees, the gardener would visit with us and we could get ice cold water for our canteens. I always admired that Masonic Home and the picture perfect setting, I would put my bike in 3rd gear so I could get to a spot at the crest of the road first and have a minute or two to take in the wonderful view and relief of the cool breeze coming up from the river. Just myself, the cherry red bike with the black seat and my Dad's combat stuff.

I think of those many, many trips each Spring. That spring after interring Dad, I stayed at my sister's home in Bloomington, not too far from Normandale Boulevard. I left my sister's home to take a drive and find a little composure. I was traveling on the Old Shakopee Road and remembered the Bike Hike days, so I took a left on Normandale Boulevard and cruised in silence on a wonderful sun-filled Spring morning, arriving at the same spot along the road where I always stopped my bicycle. I closed my eyes and let the electric windows down and felt the cool breeze on my face thinking of my Dad. I could almost hear my childhood friends off in the distance calling to hold up. I opened my eyes and looked out at the surroundings of the Masonic Home, the farm gone but still wonderful.

I looked down at my right hand and in the sunlight I saw a glimmer of gold from my ring. My Masonic ring. There on a sun filled Springtime day a Mason sat in his car, a bright cherry red corvette with black leather seats and a rag top, parked at one of my favorite places on this earth, across from the Minnesota Masonic Home in Bloomington.

A good friend of mine, although not a brother Mason; from time to time he would ask what are you doing tonight and my reply would be: I am going to Lodge. And of

course his comment was to have fun at your cult meeting. After many attempts to explain Lodge and Freemasonry the comments where always the same.

One evening before Lodge, my friend called and asked if I had a cult meeting tonight and I about had enough so my reply was, "Yes I do have a cult meeting tonight," and all I heard on the other end was, "I KNEW IT! I KNEW IT! I KNEW IT!" It seems for some reason I have trouble explaining Freemasonry. How can you be the Master of a Lodge and not be able answer the questions about the craft? I called my friend the following day to get together and maybe put an end to the cult business. I gave him three examples of what had happened to me as Master at lodge:

1) The lodge was asked if we would present a past grand officer from the state of Illinois his 50 year award. After a great dinner and during his presentation the brother getting his award had a massive heart attack and died at the altar in front of me.

2) September 11, 2001, a day that we all will remember and yes we held lodge that night.

3)The reading of a petition for a new candidate the petition was marked yes have you ever been convicted of a felony. After much debate the committee reports were ordered.

These examples show how Masons act in:

- 1) Time of crisis
- 2) Time of uncertainty
- 3) Time of character

A cult, I think not, so does my friend not any more, is he a brother Mason? Not yet, I am still working on that! In closing, as I look around this room to see if anyone is as serious about Freemasonry as I am, It looks to me that you all are. Thank you. God bless you and God bless our great country.