

The Enabling Power of Fellowship

R. W. Bro. Tim Mclsaacs

This story begins in February of 1999. Ironically, I think it was on or about Valentine's Day. Quite by chance, this was when I met my wife. It wasn't long before we became inseparable. Throughout the spring and summer, our relationship grew. We became engaged in November and were married the following summer.

Fairly early on in our relationship, I learned that my now wife was very involved in an organization called the International Order of Job's Daughters. Until I met her, I knew nothing about it. I knew a bit about Masons, but not having come from a Masonically involved family myself, the only organization I knew a little bit about was the Shriners. I remember going to the Shrine Circus while away at boarding school, and I also remember my parents taking us to various parades when I came home for vacations. Once, we even attended an event at which there were numerous units from several temples. Looking back now, I'm thinking that the Midwest convention must have been held in Winnipeg that year.

I realized early on in our relationship that if I wanted to become involved in my wife's life in a meaningful way, I would have to somehow make myself available as an adult volunteer in Job's Daughters. To do this, I would need to become a Mason. So, in the late summer of 1999, I petitioned the lodge in which my wife's brother and father were both members. I made my way through the degrees and I think it was about 2 weeks after we were engaged that I proved up as a Master Mason. I remember being very proud of the fact that on the same night I proved up, my now brother-in-law was installed as Master.

So far, I'm sure that not much of what I have told you is all that different from stories I imagine are shared throughout the Masonic community every day. But there is a difference.

You might remember that I shared with you a moment ago the fact that as a child, I regularly attended the Shrine Circus while I was away at boarding school. You are probably wondering why I was away. It wasn't because my parents were rich and traveled a lot. It wasn't because I had broken the law while still not of legal age. It was because – since I was born—I have been totally blind.

Unlike today, with the significant technological advances our world now enjoys, it was not possible for me to be educated in a so-called regular classroom in my local neighbourhood school. So, for 10 months out of every year from the time I was 6 years of age until I was 17, I lived approximately a thousand miles away from my home and family.

I have been a Mason for almost 15 years now. I have become, needless to say, very involved in Job's Daughters. In addition, I have also since joined both the Order of the Eastern Star, Scottish Rite and the Shrine.

I have sat as the Master of my lodge for 3 years, served as Worthy Patron of my chapter twice, and held leadership positions in Job's Daughters at the Bethel, Jurisdictional, Grand and Supreme levels.

The one thing that has impressed me about all of these organizations, and the thing I appreciate most, is the way in which as a person with a disability I have always been accepted for who I am. At the same time, I have never been allowed to except second best within myself. I have always been expected to do the same things as everybody else and been educated and instructed in the responsibilities that come with the various leadership roles I have been encouraged to take on. In other words, I have experienced total inclusion because I have never been placed in a position of responsibility without having been given the supports I have needed to carry out the same.

During the time I have been involved in the Masonic Family, I have learned about numerous examples of how this organization has made a difference in the lives of so many people,

As one who has grown up with what some would call a severe disability from a young age, I can attest to the fact that the earlier in life we experience disability, the more profound its effects.

I truly believe that through my participation in Masonry, I have had experiences which have helped me realize more of my potential in other aspects of my life. These opportunities were not available prior to my involvement in the Masonic family.

It is my hope that in sharing my experience, I have affirmed for all of my brothers in Free Masonry, the dramatic and positive effect our work has had, is having and will continue to have.

During my time in the Masonic family, there has been no shortage of people willing to help me with everything from exemplifying signs correctly, to organizing events, to

proper protocol during meetings – all things which are very difficult to learn vicariously when you can't watch people doing them.

In other words, it is easy to see how our philanthropy, community service, education and fellowship are born out of the genuine way in which we care for one another based on the anchor tenants of Free Masonry; these being, of course, brotherly love, relief and truth.

My wish for all of my brothers in Free Masonry is to fully know and appreciate how the elimination of physical limitations also has the potential to remove barriers which prevent participation in social institutions including education, sport, the arts and ultimately the world of work. And I am happy to say that since I became a Free Mason, I have been able to realize several dreams and goals I would have never thought possible. For I have been blessed to have experienced the enabling power of fellowship.