

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 2000**

**Grand Orator
Ronald E. Cooper
"PORTRAIT OF A MASON"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, Visiting Dignitaries of Other Jurisdictions,
and my Brethren of the Grand Lodge of California

It is my sad burden to tell all of you that Masonry is dead. Haven't you heard me news? I certainly have! I've heard it in Lodge rooms from San Diego to Yreka. I've read it in nearly every Masonic publication delivered to my mailbox during this year that I have served as Grand Orator.

That's what they are saying. Masonry is dead. Or at least, doomed to extinction within the next 20 years, 10 years, 5 years, or perhaps, if we're not careful, it's going to happen right here today at this Annual Communication. Hundreds of years of Masonic tradition and heritage have already perished or will succumb any day now.

In fact, I recently received a Lodge newsletter where Masonry's demise was talked about in the Master's column; in the Junior Warden's column; and of course never to be outdone, the Lodge Secretary had to devote half of his column to predicting the death of our fraternity. Well, that's to be understood, of course. After all, the Lodge Secretary is always a Past Master- and they usually have a hard time keeping their opinions to themselves!

However, when I look around this Grand Lodge today, I don't see the faces of mourners weeping. I see me faces of good men working together to become better men. I see fraternity and brotherhood working, hand in hand, for the continued success of Freemasonry.

I see the faces of men who have inherited me mantle of truth from our Brother Masons who, 150 years ago, had the vision and foresight to found the Grand Lodge of California. I see dedicated Masons who are making a difference. Do you see them, too?

While it's true that the number of Masons has declined in recent years. This can be traced primarily, not to the flaws in Masonry, but to flaws in society itself.

Within me pages of me insightful book, "Bowling Alone- The Collapse and Revival of American Community", author Robert Putnam explains how over the past 25 years, Americans have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, and neighbors, and in doing so, have weakened me threads mat bind our society together. PTA's, churches, synagogues, social clubs, youth organizations, political parties, and yes, our Masonic Fraternity, have all suffered declining membership since the 1960's.

Does this mean mat we, as Masons, should lower our own standards just to increase our numbers? Is it more important to ensure that Masonry simply survives and be damned with the consequences? Should we, like so many politicians listen to "spin doctors" and then change our beliefs, like a chameleon- simply desperate to blend in with the scenery around us?

I do not believe that this is the prescription for restoring Masonry's health. Alexander Hamilton wisely said, "Those who stand for Homing - fall for anything." What Masonry needs, more than anything else, is a few good men. Fewer in numbers, perhaps, but mightier man most - because we have honor and truth as our constant guideposts.

During the most trying years of the Civil War, there were less than 6,000 Masons in California. And yet, this relatively small number of men were able to work together to fulfill their dream of constructing the first Grand Lodge Temple in San Francisco. That magnificent gothic building, located at the corner of Post and Montgomery Streets was, at the time, the most beautiful and expensive Masonic Temple in America.

Is it simply the number of Masons who have made this fraternity so important? No. It is the measure of the individuals who live by their principles, and their dreams of making me world a better place, that continues to make me proud that I am a Mason.

Our Grand Master, Alvin J. Weis, carefully chose a theme for this, me Sesquicentennial Year of our ancient and honorable Fraternity in California: "Living the Dream -- Building a Better

Tomorrow." In preparation for this yearlong celebration of 150 years of Masonic heritage, I had the privilege to create the official Sesquicentennial Painting. It is a montage of many Masons who contributed their time, and their talents, to make California America's true Golden State.

Each Mason depicted in this painting had a dream, and just as importantly, the passion, to put his Masonic principles into action. Of course, the most difficult part for me as an artist was choosing, among hundreds of thousands of California Masons, the men whose portraits would be included upon my canvas. After considerable research, I selected just 34 men to be included in this commemorative painting.

I think you'll recognize a few of these men as you gaze at the painting. Their faces are familiar and their accomplishments are well known: former Governor of California and Supreme Court Justice, Past Grand Master Earl Warren; Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain; the "singing cowboy", Gene Autry; the extraordinary botanist, Luther Burbank; Cecil B. DeMille, the brilliant film director, and comedian Oliver Hardy.

There are other portraits of Masons in my painting whose faces are not so familiar, but their extraordinary contributions are legendary: Leiland Stanford, C.P. Huntington, Charles Crocker, John Bidwell, Charles Gihnan and John Sloat.

However, after completing my research, and before I even picked up a brush and paint, I knew that there were other Masons whose stories so moved me, that I felt compelled to include them in the Sesquicentennial Painting. These men were not famous in their lifetimes, and few Californians even remember their names today. Their deeds were not chronicled in the newspapers, nor have their tales been told and retold in classrooms or universities. Yet, these men believed in Masonry and turned their dreams into realities - and in doing so, they ensured a better tomorrow for their families, for their communities and for all of California. They proved to me just what that one man, one Mason, can do.

I'd like to share two of these Mason's stories with you. It is the tale of two men whose unselfish acts of charity and compassion illustrate how good men with a dream can build a better tomorrow. Journey back with me to 1832 to rural Stark County, Ohio. It is there that you'd find Dr. John Townsend. The son of English Quaker parents. Dr. Townsend had been migrating westward from his native Pennsylvania nearly all of his life. It was while he was practicing medicine in Ohio, that he met his wife, Elizabeth Schallenberger. A few months after Dr. Townsend's marriage, both of Elizabeth's parents died, leaving Elizabeth's 6-year old brother, Moses, an orphan. Dr. Townsend immediately adopted the young boy and lovingly raised him as his own son.

Dr. Townsend's wanderlust had guided him westward throughout his life. Soon the family moved farther west to Indiana, and then to Missouri. In the spring of 1844, Dr. Townsend, Elizabeth and Moses embarked upon the journey of a lifetime - to California by wagon train. Joining forces with another party of immigrants, the group headed West with 11 wagons and 40 hopeful pioneers. By the time they reached the Sierra Nevada's it was already a chilly October. They learned of a pass through the mountains by conversing with a Native American whom the settlers called, "Truckee." They followed the pass through difficult and hazardous terrain. Along the way, they had to abandon several wagons near a lake. Three men volunteered to stay with the wagons to guard their precious cargo. One of these men was Moses Schallenberger, now a young man of 17.

With more than a little misgiving, Dr. Townsend agreed to let Moses stay with the wagons, while he and Elizabeth journeyed with the rest of the party on to Sutter's Fort. Unfortunately, by the time they reached the fort, the snowfall up in the pass was too deep for a rescue party to return to assist the three men who had remained with the wagons. Moses and his two companions, sensing that they quickly needed shelter, erected a log cabin. The cabin was barely completed when the blizzards came. Fearing that they would perish before help arrived, Moses agreed to remain at the cabin while the other two men trekked through the snowdrifts to find help.

But for Moses Schallenberger, there would be no rescue for months. He survived in that barren cabin by himself, until the spring of 1845, subsisting on whatever game he could trap and occupying his time by voraciously reading books from Dr. Townsend's library. He passed that perilous winter alone in the small cabin that he had built. The same cabin which would later become the only available shelter for the ill-fated Donner Party.

Imagine his relief, when spring finally came and a rescue party sent by his adopted father. Dr. Townsend, led this young pioneer, Moses Schallenberger, out of the mountains. But the story of these two men does not end here. Dr. Townsend settled in San Francisco and quickly became active in politics. He served as both Alcalde and School Trustee in 1848 and was the city's first resident physician. He moved to San Jose in 1850 and helped to organize San Jose Lodge No. 10. That autumn waves of deadly cholera were sweeping the state and born Dr. Townsend and his beloved wife, Elizabeth, spent countless hours nursing the ill and dying. Tragedy struck when Dr. Townsend and his wife succumbed to the disease within hours of one another, leaving their own two-year old son alone and orphaned.

And what became of Moses Schallenberger? Once orphaned himself and then adopted by Dr. Townsend, Moses rushed to his young nephew and raised the boy as his own son throughout his lifetime, even sending him to college in Cambridge, England. Moses, who was also a member of San Jose Lodge, certainly knew the meaning of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

But Masonic principles are not just icons of our past. They are the beacons of our fraternity's future. This year we have celebrated our first 150 years. Let's look ahead to the year 2050, our Bicentennial year. Which one of our Masonic brothers will have significantly contributed to our fraternity's enduring success? Look around you? Who will it be? Sam Pitassi? Perhaps Sean Foran or Ron Koretz? What about Fred Kleyner? Don Nielsen? Howard Kirkpatrick or Rick Hutchinson? Or what about a young Master like Alien Casalou? Perhaps it is the Brother who is seated next to you right now. It might be your Lodge's newest Entered Apprentice. Or maybe, with determination and vision, it could be you.

From practically my first day as Grand Orator last October, I have had Masonic Brothers asking me if I had finished writing my Grand Oration yet. Their second question was even more to the point, "Will your Oration address the problems of the fraternity and include some solutions?"

Since my profession is advertising and marketing, it's easy to brainstorm about the issues facing Grand Lodge and the many membership programs that are currently being implemented to increase the positive image of Masonry. As an advertising designer, I know the power and influence of a name, and the importance of positive imagery. In fact, most corporations are willing to spend nearly any amount of money to increase positive awareness of their products.

Recently, the Prune Marketing Board made a major announcement. They are allotting 10 million dollars to improve the image of prunes, that much maligned 'but good-for-you' fruit. How are they going to do this? Well, they are willing to spend that 10 million dollars to change the name of prunes to dried plums.

And what does dried fruit have to do with Masonry? Well, it makes me wonder if most Californians think of Masons in terms of shriveled up old prunes. Or do you think they believe our fraternity is full of healthy young plums?

I am reminded, once again, of the old adage that "the solution is to be found within the problem itself." Our fraternity's long-term problem is that we need to attract good young men who are interested in becoming better men, and the first step in doing that is to renew our own sense of optimism and enthusiasm about our fraternity. Each and every one of us in this Grand Lodge can do this.

What can one Mason do? Last week I heard about one very enthusiastic Mason, Vartan Manoukian, the Junior Deacon of Tujung Lodge 592, who has already brought in 14 new members this year! Did he do this by complaining of the "good old days?" No, he set his sights on dreams of the future of Masonry and he has built up his Lodge's membership through his optimistic attitude and winning spirit.

What can one Mason do? I'd like to tell you about another Mason who is making a better tomorrow for our fraternity by working with our Masonic Youth Orders. My story opens with the tale of a young 12-year old girl who, at the urging of some childhood friends, joined a Job's Daughter Bethel here in California.

This young girl had experienced a difficult childhood. Her father abandoned the family when the girl was just a toddler. Her mother struggled as best she could to provide for her daughter without any financial support from her ex-husband. He had just walked out of their lives. There were no father and daughter weekends. No gifts from Dad under the tree at Christmas. No

presents or even a card on her birthdays from her father, and no dad at her graduation from high school or any of the important occasions when a young girl wants, and needs, a father's love.

But if she was here today, this young woman would tell you, as she has told me, that she was "lucky." Lucky because she joined Job's Daughters and found, in her Associate Bethel Guardian, a father figure who, in her own words, "Showed me just what a man should be." Her gratitude, affection and admiration for this Mason who has meant so much in her life, touched me, as I am sure it has you.

In knowing this Mason, she has been guided by a man who has looked out for her best interests, encouraged her in school, and has been a personal role model of what a father should be. And now, as radio commentator, Paul Harvey, always likes to say -- here is the "rest of me story."

For many of you know this young woman personally and most of you saw her yesterday in this very auditorium. Because the story of this young woman's life is the true story of the life of the current Miss California Job's Daughter, Shanna Fickentsher. That beautiful young woman who has, through the guidance of our Masonic Youth Orders in general, and from one Mason in particular, overcome a difficult childhood and now has a bright future ahead of her. I'm pleased to say that the Mason who has been her mentor is also a member of my own Lodge, Bin-bank No. 406. His name is Scott Nave and I applaud him for making a difference in the lives of so many young people in our community.

What can one Mason do? I'd like to tell you about a man who was a Mason for over 40 years. He was never an officer in his Lodge and he didn't always attend Stated Meetings or the functions at the Scottish Rite or his local Shrine Temple. His name was Floyd Drendel. While it's true that Floyd didn't always attend business meetings of the organizations he belonged to, he still was one of the finest Masons that I have had the privilege of knowing. Why? Because Floyd, along with his wife, Shirley, believed in putting Masonry into action. Although this wonderful couple was not blessed with children of their own they were loved by more children than you could ever count. Because Floyd and Shirley were lifelong volunteers at the Shrine Hospital in Los Angeles. They donated over 16,000 hours at the hospital helping youngsters who were burn victims or suffering from orthopedic disorders.

It's a heartwarming story, isn't it? However, some times real life stories don't always have fairy tale endings. When Floyd died a few years ago, his widow was left alone. She continued to volunteer at the Shrine Hospital, and she made a real effort to attend dinners at her husband's lodge. On one of these occasions, the Brethren presented her with a Masonic Widow's Pin. Yes, she received a pin but, unfortunately, she never received much more. Because, when her husband died, Shirley, like too many of our Masonic widows, was simply forgotten about by her husband's Lodge Brothers. She lived alone, too proud to ask for help, but too weak and unsteady on her feet to do even the simplest of chores around her house. Even an easy task like standing on a step stool to replace a kitchen light bulb was too difficult for her to do alone. Shirley passed away this spring and left a sizeable inheritance to the Shrine Hospital. The lodge trestleboards kept on being delivered to her home because no one at her husband's lodge even realized that she was gone.

This story has special meaning for me, because as I've traveled around California this year with our Grand Master, I've had the privilege of hearing him relate the story of Mrs. Pamela Murphy, another Masonic widow who seemed to have slipped through the cracks of our Brotherly responsibilities. Grand Master Weis received a letter about Mrs. Murphy detailing her life and making a special note of her tireless volunteer efforts at the Veteran's Hospital in Los Angeles. The letter concluded by saying that if Pamela Murphy, the widow of America's most decorated war hero and our Masonic Brother, Audie Murphy, could be forgotten about by the fraternity, then "what might happen to the widows of less famous Brethren?" Well, I can tell you what happens much too often. Far too many of our Masonic widows are at home, sitting alone in a darkened house with burned out light bulbs, waiting for a simple act of kindness from a single Mason.

What can one Mason do? I'd like to share a final story of another Mason, Jack Trumbower. Jack was a 50 year Mason in Monterey Park, and while in his younger years, he had attended his own Lodge frequently, after retiring from the Department of Water & Power in Los Angeles, he wasn't able to attend Lodge as often as he liked.

When Jack passed away a little over a year ago, my family met with his close friends to plan the memorial service. After checking with Jack's own Lodge, I received permission to perform the Masonic Funeral Service. One of Jack's friends, who had been designated as executor of the estate, questioned whether or not a Masonic service was appropriate. "After all," he told me, "Jack wasn't a very active Mason."

I pondered this for a while, and then gently insisted that the Masonic service be a part of the funeral. But then I got to thinking, "Who was even going to be there for the services? A few of his Lodge Brothers, perhaps? My wife, Jane, my sister-in-law, Kathy?"

But really, all of Jack's friends and family had either passed away or moved out of the area, when in recent years, the demographics had switched from a mostly older, Anglo neighborhood to what is now a community made up entirely of newly arrived immigrants from Asia.

On the day of Jack's services, we arrived at the funeral home early, and at first, there were, as I had feared, only a handful of mourners. And then, one by one, and later dozens by dozens, people entered the chapel. They were strangers to me. All of them were Asian-immigrants from China, Japan, Taiwan and other far off places. Soon, the chapel was filled to capacity. They sat, respectfully, as I conducted the Masonic Funeral Services. Then I asked if anyone would like to say a few words of final tribute to Jack Trumbower.

My wife and her sister, rose first and told everyone of Jack's kindness to their family, and particularly to their mother, Virginia, who had passed away in 1984. And then, one by one, people began rising and coming forward to speak in sorrow, and in gratitude, for the difference that Jack had made in their lives.

For you see, when Jack retired from the DWP he might not have had time to visit his Masonic Lodge as often as he once did. However, he did find the time to learn to speak Chinese, and to work at a local community center teaching English to his new neighbors.

And he helped these new immigrants in many other ways. One young man told of how in his first few weeks in America, he had gone into Jack's backyard and stolen fruit from his tree because his own family was poor and needed something to eat. The next day, there was a grocery bag overflowing with fruit and other food on this young man's doorstep. A gift from Jack to feed a hungry family. Several young persons followed with similar tales of Jack's generosity. Books bought for needy college students, tuition paid when a student loaned had failed to arrive, and encouraging words from an elderly gentleman to young immigrants to stay in school and live the American Dream.

The stories just kept coming, each more heartfelt than the last and accompanied by tears of grief at losing a dear friend. At one point I whispered to the funeral director apologizing that the services were running too long. He assured me that everything was fine and to let the tributes keep going on. In all of his career, he had never heard such touching stories of generosity. At the close of the services, I thought to myself, "Was Jack Trumbower an active Mason?" What better proof than what I had just witnessed! Masonry is felt in the heart, and expressed in the acts of kindness and generosity which we do each day. Here was a man, a true Mason, who might not have been able to attend Lodge all of the time, but lived his life, actively, as a Mason.

What can one Mason do? He can fulfill a promise to a Brother by taking care of a widow in need. Several years ago, I had the pleasure of attending Grant Park Lodge near Atlanta, Georgia. Once a month on a Saturday morning, a few of the Masons from this small lodge get together for a cup of coffee and a doughnut or two. Then they take a look at their "Honey Do" lists. You know what I mean. It's the list of chores that wives usually have for their husbands detailing little jobs that need fixing around the house. Perhaps a dripping faucet needs a new washer. A loose board needs to be nailed. A hedge that has to be trimmed, or even replacing a burned out light bulb in the kitchen ceiling. But this "Honey Do" list hasn't been made by their own wives. No, this list is a compilation of things that the Lodge's Sweethearts, their Masonic widows, need to have fixed around their homes- and these Brethren get me job done!

Could any of us not afford to spare a few hours, once a month, to help our widows by simply crossing a few chores off of their lists? Why not organize a "Honey Do" committee at your lodge to check up on our widows and see just how we can make their day-to-day lives a little easier.

What can one Mason do? He can live his life actively as a Mason. All of us do need to work hard to find the opportunities that will make our Lodges more welcoming and more inclusive. Ask yourself this simple question, are you the kind of Mason who enters a room saying, "Here I am!" Or do you come to Lodge and greet every Brother with, "Ah, there you are!"

There is something else that many Masons could do to make their own Lodges more successful. They should stay away more often. You heard me right. Stay away once in a while. Far too many Masons spend every night of the week at some Masonic related event It's Lodge on Mondays; Eastern Star on Tuesday; Shrine Club on Wednesdays, Amaranth on Thursdays; White Shrine on Fridays; and then York Rite (or was it the Scottish Rite?) on Saturdays. Maybe, just maybe, these good intentioned Masons take an occasional Sunday off for "good behavior." Oops, I forgot, there's probably a DeMolay, Job's Daughters or Rainbow event on Sundays!

Like most of you, I truly enjoy being a part of the Family of Freemasonry. However, a big part of our dwindling numbers can be traced to how insular and inbred we have become. How can you ever meet new people, and introduce them to the fellowship and friendship of Masonic life, if you never have time yourself to meet anyone new?

So take a night off from Masonry now and then. Coach a Little League team; volunteer at a hospital; attend a mixer at your local Chamber; learn to line dance; or master your home computer by taking a night school class. Make new friends and, as you would do with any friend, welcome them into our Masonic Family. Let's widen our circle of friends and share the good news about our wonderful fraternity.

Let's also open our lodges, and our hearts to our neighbors in our local communities. Set up an action plan to utilize your lodge building as a true community resource. Invite the public to your lodge for blood drives; as a polling center at election time; sponsor first aid classes or create an emergency center in your lodge in case of a natural disaster or other emergency. Perhaps when our neighbors see that there are no "hidden agendas" or "dark secrets" in our lodge buildings, they will be more receptive to becoming members of the Family of Freemasonry.

I don't want anyone to leave here today thinking that it will be a simple task to keep Masonry on the right track in the future. As Brother Will Rogers reminded us, "Even if you're on me right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there!"

We cannot procrastinate. The time is at hand to celebrate Masonry's historic contributions and it's exciting future. Let's not dwell on the negatives, nor mourn the "what might have beens." Let's bury the destructive words of doom and gloom and take up the challenge of building a better tomorrow.

My Brethren, I challenge each of you to go out each day and ask yourself, "What can I, one Mason, do today for a child? What can I, one Mason, do today for a widow? What can I, one Mason, do today for my community?" If each of you, as one Mason, can answer these simple questions every day, I promise you that you will not only be living your dream of being a better Mason, but you will be building a better tomorrow where Masonry's light will shine ever brighter.

This is a challenge that, together, we can meet, and conquer, only by proudly upholding our Masonic principles and putting men into action on every day that the Great Architect of the Universe graciously gives to us.

I'd like to leave you with these words of wisdom from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at the time of challenge." My Brethren, join with me and take up the challenge. Thank you.