

Dear Son...

Unknown

This Short Talk Bulletin was inspired by two sentences contained in an extensive report to the Grand Master in Texas in 1978 by the Grand Lodge Printing Committee. We thank Right Worshipful Brother Furman Vinson, P.G.M., Texas, for sharing this report with us.

"There is reason to believe that the family relationship is a weak link in the process that induces young men to seek Light within Freemasonry. Masons who attend lodge fifty or sixty times a year in addition to other Masonic organizations, are officers, or are engaged in a lot of committee work which take them away from their families, may be setting examples their sons do not wish to follow. "

It was not a pleasure trip for Jim. He had just flown half way across the country on a variety of air lines, and was now driving a rental car into the little town where he had been born and where he had grown up. It had been several years since he had been to his hometown. Many changes had taken place. Mentally, Jim was making note of the changes.

There was a new wing on the old school from which he had graduated so many years ago ... a filling station where the old feed store used to be ... a motel sprawled across the field where he used to play baseball ... a municipal parking lot with parking meters had replaced the movie hall ... and there was a fancy new hardware store next to the old drug store in the Masonic temple. Jim continued driving slowly through the center of town to an impressive turn-of-the-century white house with its manicured lawn. A dignified sign identified the house as "Goode Funeral Home – Benjamin A. Goode, Funeral Director." Parking the car, Jim took a deep breath, walked to the door and rang the bell. Answering the melodic chimes was a man with a full head of snow-white hair which accentuated his red face and penetrating eyes. Jim remembered Mr. Goode as one of his father's best friends, and was expecting him to be long-faced and distraught over his father's death.

Instead, Ben Goode was jovial and seemed genuinely glad to see Jim, greeting him with a hearty smile and firm handclasp. "Jim, you've grown a foot at least since I last saw you. C'mon into the kitchen and let's have a cup of coffee and a gab fest." One cup led to another as Jim told Mr. Goode of his stint with the Marines in Viet Nam, his college days and his struggles in the

business world. And, of course, he bragged about the fact that his wife was about to present him with their first child.

That was when Mr. Goode first mentioned Jim's father. "I remember the night when you were born. Your Dad was about the proudest father I ever saw. He came right from the hospital to the Lodge Hall bragging that Martha had just given birth to the future Master of Glenview Lodge. After the work that night, your Dad went down to the drug store and bought a box of the best 25c cigars they had and passed 'em around during refreshment."

Jim squirmed a bit in his chair and mumbled something about hadn't they better talk about arrangements for the funeral. "Nope!" Ben said, "When your Dad was Master of the Lodge, he planned every detail of every meeting ... and they always went off without a hitch. His funeral will, too, 'cause he planned it all. Reverend Shuter, who was Grand Chaplain a couple of years back, will conduct the service here at the Home; Ole Johnson, the Lodge Organist will play the music; the Pall Bearers are all Past Masters and the Graveside Service will be conducted by Bill Avery, the District Deputy, and the boys from the Lodge. You don't have to worry about a thing."

Before leaving the funeral home, Jim looked in where his father's body rested in the coffin surrounded by mounds of flowers. Dad looked natural and at peace. The Past Master's jewel on his coat lapel glistened. Jim closed his eyes and offered a silent prayer.

As he said goodnight to his father's old friend, Ben Goode handed Jim an envelope. "Special delivery," he said. "Your Dad gave this to me a couple of weeks ago. Said he didn't trust the Post Office."

Once in his motel room, Jim took the envelope out of his pocket. In bold letters across the face of it, his father had written, "James Arthur Mastain." Inside the envelope were five pages of a hand written letter in the clear, though shaky, handwriting of his father. He read:

"Dear Son:

Don't grieve for me. While the end of my mortal life draws near, I eagerly look forward to my journey to that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns.

I have lived a full, rich life. The good Lord has blessed me with his bounty. Until this past year, I have had excellent health. Your mother and I had forty-seven years of mutual trust, understanding and love, before she went to her eternal rest. We were truly blessed when you came into our lives. We tried to give you the best of everything. We gloried in your accomplishments and shared your troubles. You are now a man, though you'll always be my little boy. You served your country well, and you are well on your way to becoming a successful business man. I'm proud of you, son, and am sorry I will not get to see my grand-child.

As I explained to you when you came back from Viet Nam, I could never ask you to become a Mason, that it must be your desire to become one. I'm hoping that some day you will decide to become part of that Universal Brotherhood which has been such a major factor in my life.

Last night, in an effort to take my mind off my physical discomfort, I recited every bit of Masonic ritual I could remember, and mentally checked off how I had put into practice the tenets and teachings of Freemasonry. For the most part, I think I have been a true Man and Mason.

Masonry has made me a better man. It has brought me close to my religious teachings. It has made me a better person, a better husband and made me feel closer to Almighty God. I have enjoyed the fellowship of my Brothers and shared in their concern for our fellowman.

There are some definite duties that a man owes to his God, his country, his family, his neighbor, and to himself. The one area in which I failed was in my duties to the family. When you were growing up, you must have thought there was nothing else in my life but Masonry. I realize now that I was over-zealous in my lodge activities – Lodge meetings, visitations, rehearsals, committees, study groups, candidate instruction.

I can't help wondering if that is why you never asked for a petition. It just may be that I gave you the wrong impression – that it was all work – that the duties of a Mason were too time consuming. One of the lessons in the ritual is that we should never let our zeal for the institution interfere with our usual vocations. I guess you might say that that's a lesson I learned – too late.

Son, my inevitable meeting with death is near, but my journey leads to the Everlasting Habitation of our creator. I ask that you think on these things.

Be a good man, a faithful husband, a loving and understanding father, true to the faith of your acceptance, and a good citizen. While these are the teachings of Freemasonry, they are attributes of a real man.

Your loving Father. "

Jim read the letter over and over. He recalled those high school days when Dad couldn't attend the school play in which he had the lead because it was "Official Visitation." He remembered the time when he wanted to get some paternal advice, only to find that "Dad's gone to a meeting. " He smiled as he remembered one time when they were in church. When the minister closed his prayer with "Amen," Dad had automatically boomed, "So Mote it be."

Yes, he thought, I guess I have been "turned off" on the Masons. And, I guess it was because Dad worked so hard at it. I never knew much about it, but did know that it took a lot of work and a lot of time. I guess I just didn't want to get involved.

It was a big funeral. Ben Goode bustled around seeing that everyone was seated just so. The Masons all sat together. Jim couldn't help but think that they were here paying their respects to a

Brother Mason, a friend and a man. Everything went off just as Ben Goode had said it would..."without a hitch" – just as Dad had planned it.

Returning from the graveside service Jim thought, "What a great bunch of guys. Everyone of them had been influenced by Dad. They really loved him. What a close-knit group they are. There must be something to their talk about "immortality." They really make me feel that Dad isn't dead – he's just gone on a trip to a better life.

As they drove up to the Funeral Home, Mrs. Goode came out to meet them. "Jim," she said, "the hospital just called. Beth and your SON are both fine." Jim broke into a wide grin. "Ben," he said, "Let's go down to the drug store and get some of those 25c cigars. The boys at the lodge might like to know about the future Worshipful Master."

All names, places, events and lodges mentioned in this Bulletin are fictional. Any relationship to actual events is purely intentional. And, as this is fiction, you can be sure that in subsequent weeks, Jim Mastain "saw the Light. "

STB - March 1979