

Jack Buta has contributed a number of good research papers to the Philalethes, and to Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry, including the fearless 'The God Conspiracy: the politics of Grand Lodge foreign relations', serialised over three issues of the Philalethes in 2008. The present article is in a different vein.

How many Masons does it take to change the face of Freemasonry?

by Jack Buta MPS

The other day while talking on the phone to Brother Ken Hawkins about change in Freemasonry, I was reminded of a story Zig Ziglar used to tell about crickets in a mason-jar. 'When I was a boy in Yazoo City, Mississippi I used to collect crickets in a mason-jar,' he would begin. 'I would punch air-holes in the lid and watch the crickets try to jump out of the jar, hitting the lid like a swarm of angry bees. Then, after a while I found the crickets did not jump up quite as far as the lid, having realized they could not escape. Eventually I could take the lid off the jar without any of the crickets escaping. Isn't that amazing?'

Zig could have been talking about a 'Mason-Jar' with us being the crickets who have stopped trying to open that lid. It surely does apply. Do these phrases sound familiar? 'Wait a while with patience', or how about 'Time, perseverance and patience can accomplish all things', or 'Progress in Masonry occurs at glacial speed'? For hundreds of years in this country young Masons have been given the same advice every time they have tried to enact change. After growing tired of hitting their heads they usually come to the conclusion they cannot do anything and give up trying. In many cases they turned to other pursuits and climbed round after round of the ladder which leads to success in our fraternity and eventually changed the color of their aprons from white to purple [or, as we would say, from light blue to dark blue and gold—Ed]. At that point a strange phenomenon occurred: they began to repeat this same advice to those who followed.

Occasionally, one Mason would see the error in this self-limiting philosophy and try to effect change on his own, only to be bullied and threatened. In the end, afraid of being ostracized, he would fall back in line and march to the sound of the 'status quo' dirge.

One day, not too long ago, a young Mason witnessed his father try to stand up to right a great wrong within the Fraternity, and watched as he was defeated at every turn. The son was proud of his father and decided he would pick up his fight, but this time he would not allow himself to be defeated. For the next seven years he climbed the ladder to success within the Fraternity hierarchy, but as he climbed he sought out those who also saw the great wrong, and enlisted them in his cause. Quietly, this small group of Masons laid out their plans and built their strategy for change. The day the son was installed as Grand Master he asked his father, a PGM, to read a proclamation calling on the Grand Lodge to right a wrong which had gone uncorrected for over 225 years. He charged them to correct this wrong, not in the next decade, not in the next five years, not even in one year, but within the next six months. When the proclamation was made, the young Masons in the room jumped to their feet and gave the PGM standing applause. Six months later this few, this happy few, this band of brothers, changed the face of Freemasonry in North America by arranging for both the Grand Lodge of Connecticut and the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Connecticut to mutually recognize each other on the same day. The date was 14 October 1989, and the state was Connecticut. The Father was Gail L Smith PGM, the son was Gail N Smith PGM. How many men did it take

to change the face of Freemasonry in America? In this case just five, including Ken Hawkins PGM, Preston Pope PGM (PHA) and Lewis Myrick PGM (PHA). What these men did almost 20 years ago is heroic, and on 3 December 2008 they will be honored by both Grand Lodges in Connecticut. How many Masons does it take to change the face of Freemasonry in your jurisdiction?

It takes just one . . . YOU.