

Provincial Grand Master, Grand Officers, Provincial Officers, Brethren all.

Since we last met, on the 22nd of November 2019, the pandemic has brought profound changes to our way of life; many lives have been lost, and many lives have been irreversibly affected. Since we last met, we have learnt probably not to take anything for granted!

I am sure that there are some of us here this evening that know of at least one person that unfortunately is no longer with us. But, during that time, what a pleasure it was for many of us to be involved in delivering the Sunday meals on wheels to so many of our brethren who were either isolating or unable to go shopping for food. The friendly greeting we received when we knocked on each front door made it all worthwhile, and our thanks must go to the teams of caterers at each centre who gave up their time also to prepare the meals.

So, on that more enjoyable and thankful tone, how lovely it is to see so many of you here this evening, to firstly support this event, but more importantly to enjoy each other's company in less formal surroundings than a traditional Festive Board. Little did I think back on that evening in 2019, when the PGM announced his Senior & Junior Wardens, that I would still be here two years later!

Brethren, I would now, just for a moment, like to take you back in time, and explain how I have finished up speaking to you this evening.

On several occasions over the last few months, whilst on Provincial duties with our PGM, he always introduced his active officers to the brethren and informed them that the Junior Warden and he go back many years to the days when we joined the Essex Police Force on the same day and completed our training at Eynsham Hall in Oxfordshire.

That was back in early 1976, we were both in our early 20's, you Terry having already served your country in the Navy, (but we won't mention the Cod War) and I had trained as a Scenes of Crime Photographer with the Police.

Terry, you continued to have a distinguished career in the force, whilst I eventually left the uniform branch and returned to civilian duties for the next 40 plus years in Forensic crime scene investigations.

On your retirement I remember you arriving in my department and saying that if I had stayed in the force, we could have both been 'walking out' on the same day, as we had 'walked in' some 30 years earlier.

Neither of us were masons in those early days, and I first joined Masonry in November 1993, and although we never seemed to attend the same meetings, I am sure our love and support of our Mother Lodges is the same today as it was then.

So, moving on, what a delight it was for all of us when in May 2015 you were appointed as our PGM, and it was in that capacity that during the early summer of 2019 I received a mobile phone call from you. The signal strength was poor, and I apologised that I was working on my beach hut in West Mersea, to which your first comment was - Goodness, how nice it must be to be rich! and I replied, "ha ha, I'm not on a Senior Police Officers Pension."

But of course, the reason for your call was that you wished to appoint me as your Junior Warden for the following year. Brethren, the rest is history, and I can assure you, it has been an honour that I shall treasure for the rest of my masonic years.

Brethren, during my years at Police Headquarters in Chelmsford, I often had the need to visit the Police Federation Office, and there indulged in masonic banter with the one and only Mick West, the ProvGDC.

Mick, although having a top man at the helm as we do, we will always need a right-hand man, to guide us, humour us and downright tell us what to do! I now ask the brethren to show their appreciation for all you do as our Provincial Director of Ceremonies, especially during these difficult times, and more especially since September this year when the Provincial visits kicked off with over 16 ceremonies to arrange leading up to Felsted in May next year. We now know that you are human like the rest of us, since you renamed the Brethren of the Southern Star as the Northern Star at their consecration the other week, much to the delight of the Northern Star brethren present! Mick, thank you so much.

Brethren, a few weeks before the end of Lockdown, my wife Sue asked one evening, did I realise it was the first time in 45 years of marriage that I have been in every single night of the week! No masonic meetings, no singing, no conducting of choirs, but just enjoying time together, and with that in mind, Sir, I have looked up your Masonic membership, and lost count of the number of Lodges and degrees that you support but hope that your very understanding wife still remembers what you look like.

One thing is for sure, we know that you have a taste for Vodka, having asked for all the left-over deserts at the Consecration of Southern Star the other week! So, coming from Tiptree and that well known jam manufacturer, as a final thank you for appointing me your Junior Warden, please accept these liquors and alcoholic jams on my behalf!

Terry, since your appointment in 2015, and especially during these last difficult two years you have led the Essex Mark Province with dignity, pride and with such enthusiasm, that it is no wonder that it is fast becoming one of the largest Mark Provinces with 50 plus Lodges, and long may it continue.

Brethren will you please be upstanding and drink a bumper toast to Terry, our Provincial Grand Master.

Thank you, brethren, enjoy the rest of the evening!

Norman R. Eastbrook M.B.E. ProvGJW