WALLETS

January 3, 2005

My Brothers,

There's a credit card commercial that asks, "What's in your wallet?" Good question. We never know how much stuff we have in there until we have to look for something, like a Proficiency Card. It's safely tucked away in our wallets, somewhere. We could probably find it if we sorted through the old Dues Cards, gas receipts, dog-eared notes and business cards, and the various pieces of plastic identity layered on top of it.

Wallets are a little bit like time capsules, aren't they? They carry most of the things that matter to us that are smaller or flatter than a set of keys. The stuff in there, from scraps of paper and random phone numbers, to our Driver's License, had a purpose at the time it was put in there, and we hate to throw any of it away. We only empty a wallet and sort through this scrapbook of our life when it gets too fat to sit on or when we get a new one as a present. We'll never buy one on our own because new wallets aren't ever like the old one. A new one has different pockets and windows and separators for our stuff and when it comes down to it, it just 'sits' differently. A new wallet is always telling us, "I'm Here!" It takes time for a new wallet to quiet down and conform, to become a comfortable fit and forgotten again.

Becoming a Mason is a bit like receiving a new mental wallet. With its receipt, we begin cleaning out old memories in preparation for creating new ones. For, in that new Masonic wallet, we will carry time capsules of memory about things that are, and have been, important milestones for us as Masons. We will tuck them away in little compartments for safekeeping. Eventually, those mental snapshots will become torn and frayed and maybe missing a little bit; memory can be like that. And, after a time, just like a wallet that has been broken in, the proficiency memories and the things we first learned about Masonry and ourselves will quiet down and conform; they'll get comfortable, and then, forgotten. Not to worry; we have a Proficiency Card somewhere that proves we knew all that stuff.

It's funny how we take our Masonic wallet for granted. We're content to watch a new Mason get his first Masonic wallet without thinking much about the condition of our own. We metaphorically sit on our wallet of knowledge and feel comfortable about having it, even if we don't really remember all of what's in there. But that's not the way the new Mason feels. He's excited. Can you remember the first time you were given a wallet when you were a boy? How proud you felt, how excited you were to open it up and see all the things inside; the little plastic picture windows and that long pocket where money goes (or maybe even was!). You couldn't wait to put things in it!

That new Mason is feeling just like that. He's already slipped the memories of his Obligation right into the slot for Driver's Licenses and he has mental photos of the Master advancing toward him and of being conducted by the Senior Deacon. He's already begun putting scraps in it; there are notes about Charters and Brotherly Love and a name or two, and grocery lists for Temperance and Justice and Clay. And, boy, is he excited! He wants to show that new wallet around with pride and share the few precious things he's been able to put in it. He, and his new wallet, are saying, "I'm Here, I'm Here!”

And there we sit on our quiet and comfortable old wallet, taking it all in stride with our older and wiser scraps and photos. We don't really have to get involved in all that enthusiasm; we're in the business of making Masons. We're happy for the new Mason, sure, but we're paternally pleased rather than excited along with him. We don't have to really look in that wallet he wants to show us; we know what's in there; we just gave it to him. And with that complacency and reserve, with that unconscious and unintended distancing from his enthusiasm, we have just missed an opportunity.

We are being offered a gift when we witness the making of a new Mason. As he has metaphorically just received a new wallet in which to store his Masonic proficiencies and memories, Masonry offers us a new one, too. This becomes our opportunity to clean out our old one, to revisit the scraps of memory tucked away and remember what they mean. It is a chance to make new and fresh, by way of his enthusiasm and discoveries, the rumpled bits of Masonry we've forgotten over time. In the making of every new Mason there is a second chance for us, a chance to discover Masonry, once again. His new wallet, and the one just like it that we are being offered, is the exact model of our old one. Its several parts fit together with exact nicety, and though new, we can with utmost confidence know that it will be comfortable.

When we join with the new Brother and share with him his enthusiasm and discoveries in Masonry, that new wallet is there for us, too; we should not sit on the opportunity.

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