



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

June 28, 2013

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Today's DMC Newsletter features the attached article written by our brother, Peter Sellars. Peter is a distinguished member of this Order. He is a long time member of the Grand Lodge Board of Directors, and has served this Order over the years in many capacities, including Grand Instructor and Grand Patriarch. He is the author of important books relating the history of Odd Fellowship, and he is one of the most knowledgeable members when it comes to our Ritual and our Codes. Significantly, he is a progressive member of this Order and is a charter member of DMC.

The attached article is hard-hitting, but it says what needs to be said about tolerance, understanding, openness to new ideas, and more importantly about friendship, love and truth. It's definitely worth reading and discussing in your Lodge.

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Dave Rosenberg

THE PROGRESS THAT WAS TAKEN AWAY

Aside from membership, history has been my main focus as a member of this Order. When I joined the Odd Fellows, I felt it was something I would not stay with very long. I was still in the military service and I wanted to finish my BS degree. I had no time to give to the Odd Fellows. Eventually, I did attend a meeting and became the Vice Grand that very meeting; I never looked back.

A couple of years passed before women were allowed to join our ranks, which I discovered was not a change welcomed by everyone. In fact, the year women were allowed to join, I found myself as one of the Grand Lodge appointed officers where I had the experience and pleasure of visiting many lodges. Without naming the discontented person I travelled with and for, who hated seeing women in lodges, I saw his negativity as my motivation of bringing women in the Order. The first two years, I introduced over 50 women into our ranks and was happier for doing it.



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I can tell you on those many visits, I heard the most vicious comments made from men who were supposed to be full of this "friendship, love, and truth." Many were not. Some threatened to quit the Order. Some boycotted their meetings if a woman came to visit. Some attacked the officers that year for their bigotry. Talk about having a motivating year. I saw, first hand, what this Order was up against.

Being a Catholic, a fact unknown to lodges I visited and members I met, I would often hear negative comments about my faith. I also heard comments made about certain ethnicities in the Order. These were my motivating factors to forge ahead. I did not want to quit just because I did not like what I heard; I wanted to stay around to fight the prejudice that I was hearing. I did that by bringing diverse members into our lodges.

I remember receiving an award from Sovereign Grand Lodge for bringing in 42 members in 2001. I came in 3rd a couple of years following that peak year. I never stopped. I have always made it a goal to bring in 10 applications a year. Most of them have stayed in the Order too. I was always honest with the women and the "minorities" telling them that they were helping me with breaking the barrier. I had no second thoughts about what I was doing.

I made it a point to learn the history better than most members. I also made it a point to learn our Rituals and Codes more than most. I committed to memory much of the unwritten work too. But, I did all of this so I could take on the older recalcitrant members unwilling to bend in their racist, bigoted, and prejudiced views. If they brought up the Ritual or the Code or the history, I had a response. I stopped them in their tracks more than once.

Serving on the Grand Lodge Board of Directors for nearly nine years now, serving as the Grand Instructor twice, having been the Grand Patriarch, also a Grand Instructor for the Grand Encampment, as well as a Grand Trustee, has been the opportunity to share a progressive attitude. As the membership chairman, I have learned it is imperative this Order be more progressive in its views and tear down the barricades established by the members who allowed this Order to find itself on the brink of extinction.

I am not an uncaring or a "mean" member. I practice our principles of Friendship, Love, & Truth, but those who feel they must disrespect me because of who I bring in this Order or what my lodge does to enjoy its successes or pick on others because they do not know the Ritual or Codes, will get a mouthful from me. I do not tolerate bullies. I have seen all of the bullies I will ever want to see in the Odd Fellows. My brothers and sisters love this Order. We enjoy the principles as they are written in our Rituals. We live by them as well.



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"The Progress That Was Taken Away" occurred in 1858 at the session of the Grand Lodge of the United States. We talk about the barriers of today, which are still present, but the barriers that were broken in 1854 were tremendous - almost fictional or difficult to believe. In 1854, California presented legislation to the Grand Lodge of the United States which would allow Chinese residents in California to join the Order. Not only join the Order, but "permitted to work in Lodges of their own in the Chinese language!" That was progress! That was progress made by members in California.

Unfortunately, although the proposal passed in 1854, the racists of the other jurisdictions fought hard to repeal the 1854 decision. In a very long written argument full of scientific beliefs the Chinese were proven not to be of "good moral character." And here we are today.

We continue to fight this attitude. As our numbers diminish, it is hopeful those who have been causing the Odd Fellows to fall, will stand out. We admit all religions, races, ages 16 and up, and genders. There are no barriers per our Codes or Rituals. Believe in a Supreme Being and keep a secret and you may be a member of this Order.

Fraternally your brother,

Peter V. Sellars