

Petition Thoughts: The Interview

Well, I had my `Masonic' interview last night, and I'm embarrassed to say how enjoyable it was.

In my mind, I had expected something between a Senate confirmation hearing and the Spanish Inquisition. I guess you could chalk it up to one too many harsh elementary school teachers or perhaps entering the military too young, but my imagination had really worked overtime on "The Interview".

I imagined that two very much older men, with somewhat severe expressions would arrive at my door. They'd both be wearing 1960's era suits -- almost the men-in-black look, but not as cool. Picture Joe Friday with a bit of a paunch. I'd introduce them to my wife and they'd both nod in her direction and say "Ma'am" with a little perfunctory smile.

After drinks and snacks had been served, the older man would open his brief case. "Well, Mr. Hudson", he'd say, "we've got a number of questions for you, so we'd better get started. Do you swear upon your life and the lives of the members of your family that you unreservedly believe in the God of your childhood?"

Oh, I was prepared for this one. I'd crafted an answer that both expressed my absolute belief in a Supreme Being but still left me plenty of room for doubt, inquiry and growth from the somewhat limited ideas I had about God when I was a kid. Still, I imagined the Senior Official would simply say "I see", while the slightly younger man would take down a few notes.

Then the Senior Official would ask "Do you have any personality faults that would make you a detriment to our Great Fraternity? For instance, do you believe in the theory of Atlantis or the Loch Ness Monster? Have you ever been politically incorrect? Are you a `good' person?" Ho boy! As a person whose spent way too much time in introspection I could probably confess to a huge list of personal failings. Not the least of which is my tendency to be super critical of myself! Well, let's see, I eat too much fat, I don't exercise enough, I have an irreverent sense of humor, I've told the occasional inappropriate joke. I enjoy the X-Files more than is probably healthy. I was rude to the clerk at the Radio Shack six months ago. I even worried that perhaps I didn't have enough self-esteem, or what if I have too much!

"I see", said the Senior Official. "Any crimes we should know about?" I was okay there. "I've had a couple of traffic violations but they wouldn't keep me out for that. Right? Oh, and then there was the time I got home from Home Depot and discovered I'd put the package of screws in my pocket instead of the cart. But I took them back the next week. So that won't count either, right? Right?"

"Let's discuss your financial picture. If you were to lose your job tomorrow, how can we be certain you'd never be a burden to the Brothers of our Fraternity?"

Yikes! Once again, I was back on shaky ground. "I can't afford to buy a house right now, but I pay all my bills on time and I have a little money in the bank. I have some credit card debt, but I'm saving some, though not as much as I should. But I promise, I'll quit before I let myself be a burden!"

"Uh-huh. One more question Mr. Hudson. Why do you feel we should let you become a Mason?" This is the question that holds terror for those of us who think entirely too much. On any interview, whether it's for a job or entering a fraternity, this is the moment of truth. It's your time to list your qualifications for the position and let them grade you. Come up with a sufficient list of reasons and you're in. Otherwise, well, not everyone gets the job they wanted.

"Well Mr. Hudson. That about wraps it up. We're still waiting for the paperwork to come back from the IRS, the Department of Defense and the various State Agencies, but we expect to let you know the results in a few weeks. Thank you for your time." Another perfunctory smile and then they'd be gone.

Man, did I have it completely wrong! Instead "The Interview" was just plain fun. The two men who came from the lodge were open, casual and comfortable. One was a little older than me, but the other was my age or younger. Both were more than polite to my entire family and seemed genuinely pleased to be there. Both were men I'd like to visit again.

Both men had a great sense of humor. At one point one of them asked me "Are you now, or have you ever been an ax murderer?" I joked "Not that I remember" and we all had a big laugh.

We discussed some Masonic historical speculation -- one of my interviewers enjoys, as I do, the legend that the Masonry is descended from the Knights Templar who learned the 'Mysteries' from the builders of the Pyramids. Although it wasn't specified, I got the definite opinion that watching the X-Files was not a 'failing criterion'.

They had no questions about the details of my belief in a Supreme Being - simple belief was enough. And when I brought the subject up, we had a great conversation that really left me feeling welcomed, heard and respected. There was an application to fill out but it was only a little more detailed than the petition form I'd filled out earlier. Mostly wanting a few former addresses, some brief work history, and the contact information for my references. The only 'financial' question was whether I knew there'd be dues involved and did I think I'd be able to pay them without burdening my family.

Finally, before they left, they did ask me why I wanted to become a Mason. I told them about my father and my grandfather being made a Mason. I told them about my interests in psychology and comparative religion. But more importantly, I told them that I believe there really is 'something' to the Masonry. Something that could help me to become an even better man that I already may be. And because of that, I really want to give the Masonry a try!

So, finally, the petitioning process is over for me for now. Of course, I can't predict with absolute certainty how the ballot will come out. I feel pretty confident, but as with many human endeavors, it only takes one person to change the outcome. Regardless of this particular ballot, it has been a worthwhile exercise and in many ways has been a gift that I've given to myself. It has been a period of sometimes uncomfortable self-examination but more often of exciting self-discovery. And that, my friends, is my real reason for joining the Masonry!

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