



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

October 24, 2013

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

A few days ago, I sent out a DMC Newsletter where I sketched the evolving and changing customs and attitudes of this Order. I received a fascinating response from one of our DMC members who has been a member of this order since 1959 - almost half a century of membership. This member filled in some notes about his particular memories of these changes. Makes for interesting reading! I provide his thoughts to you, below:

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Dave Rosenberg, Grand Warden

Did you know that Odd Fellows first held their meetings in pubs and taverns, singing songs, eating food, and drinking ale?

Did you know that Odd Fellowship once excluded from membership all women, black men, Asian men, Native American men, and persons who were deaf or blind?

When I joined Odd Fellowship in 1959, and I am serious about this, the face of the application included the wording: "I attest that I am of full white blood."

Did you know that once the only men who were permitted to join a Rebekah Lodge were men holding the Third Degree of Odd Fellowship?

Did you know that the first Lodges in North America were "self-instituted", that is no Grand body authorized their formation?

Did you know that Sovereign Grand Masters were once known as Grand Sires?

The term "Grand Sire" was seen as likened to royalty and was replaced with Sovereign Grand Master.

Did you know that Odd Fellowship once had a "sign of distress" and an answer to that sign? And when the sign could be observed, the member in distress could use certain words, pronounced in full, to indicate distress.

The Initiatory Degree in 1959 included these signs.



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Did you know that once upon a time when a member of the Order desired to be recognized as an Odd Fellow by another Member of the Order, he could give a secret "sign of recognition"? When both the sign and the answer were given, the members could advance to each other, shake hands and exchange the words "Are you looking for me?" and the response "For you."

The sign of recognition was omitted around 1965. When I joined in 1959, a new member had to memorize all of the secret work and recite it on the floor in front of the membership. We took memorization seriously then. However, we took in a member around the time I joined who was so frightened of this requirement that we never saw him again. He paid dues for about 30 years but never again made an appearance.

Did you know that in Odd Fellowship there was once a "warning sign" and a "sign of safety", as well as a "sign of danger" that a member could use when conveying warning, danger or safety?

This was omitted around the same time.

Did you know that the First Degree, the Second Degree and the Third Degree of Odd Fellowship once each had its own unique and secret grip?

Did you know that once Odd Fellows Lodges provided money to help support members who were out of work?

In my early days of Odd Fellowship I attended a monthly meeting of a "Relief Committee" which was set up for this purpose.

Did you know that at one time there were five Degrees obtainable by a member in a Lodge of Odd Fellows (not just four degrees that are presently available)?

In reading early history of the degrees, I came across information that the Initiation was held outside and a fire was made in a brazier, kind of an outdoor stove. The candidate was required to touch the brazier and perhaps sustain a burn. It was like fraternity hazing.

Did you know that once two or three members of the Order could "black-ball" or prohibit new applicants from being initiated?

My father told me that in the 1930s, a prominent physician was black-balled from our lodge because of his religious beliefs. My father never got over the shame that some of our prejudiced members brought upon our lodge.

Did you know that consumption of alcohol was once always prohibited in Odd Fellows Lodges?

Even a step further, there was a time that bartenders were not allowed to join Odd Fellows.



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Did you know that the word "Independent" was not added to the name of Order of Odd Fellows until 1814?

Did you know that the ritual of our Degrees has been revised and re-written on numerous occasions since the 1800's?

There have been recent movements to omit the degrees altogether but they give our Order individuality and definition.

I offer this short summary of some changes in Odd Fellowship, for those members who don't believe that this Order evolves and changes. Clearly, evolution is part and parcel of our history as an Order. We have, in fact, evolved, to fit our times. And we need to continue to evolve to meet the needs of the 21st Century because, at bottom, it is men and women in the 21st Century that we have to attract to our Order.

It is a fine balance to keep up with the times and yet maintain some ties with our rich and colorful history. My responses show that we have eliminated some of our "bad baggage" but we have to continue to work to make sure that we maintain a contemporary approach and at the same time respect our past.