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The chamber of reflection

by W Bro. Helio L. Da Costa Jr.

Most of the brethren who received their initiations in Mexico, Central and South America, Europe, Middle East and Africa will be acquainted with the Chamber of Reflection. It is used in the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, the French Rite, the Brazilian Rite and other rites derived from the ones just mentioned.

Albert G. Mackey in his *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* explains that the Chamber of Reflection is "...a small room adjoining the lodge, in which, preparatory to initiation, the candidate is enclosed for the purpose of indulging in those serious meditations which its sombre appearance and the gloomy emblems with which it is furnished are calculated to produce. It is also used in some of the advanced degrees for a similar purpose."

This small room or chamber, which does not necessarily adjoin the lodge room, is dark, with the walls painted black, or, as in one case I saw, imitating a

rocky underground cave. It contains the following: a simple rough wooden table on which we find: a human skull, usually on two crossbones, a chunk of bread, a pitcher with water, a cup with salt, a cup with sulphur, a lighted candle or lantern, an hourglass, paper, ink and pen, a wooden stool or chair. Painted on the wall: a rooster, a sickle, the acronym V.I.T.R.I.O.L.(U.M.) and various sayings.

The chamber reminds one's self of the caves where primitive men lived. In psychoanalysis, it is a symbol of regression. It is also a symbol of the maternal womb. The profane is regressing to a time of innocence and to a state in his mother's womb. When he emerges from the chamber, it shall be as if being born as a new man. Contrariwise, the cave can also be the symbol of a sepulchre, as the tombs of the ancients in biblical times. Thus, the chamber indicates, at the same time, a beginning and an end: the end of one's life as



St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver has been the recipient of a donation from this jurisdiction for several years.

a profane, and the beginning of a new life as an initiate in search of light, truth and wisdom. This can also be interpreted as a form of resurrection. This motif of death and resurrection is mentioned in Plutarch's *Immortality of the Soul* thus:

The soul at the moment of death, goes through the same experiences as those who are initiated into the great

mysteries. The word and the act are similar: we say *telentai* (to die) and *telestai* (to be initiated).

Together with the crossbones, sickle and the hourglass, the skull naturally refers to mortality and is linked to the alchemical references also present in the chamber.

The alchemists aimed at transmuting base metals into

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VOLUME 75 / NUMBER 9

EDITED by Trevor W. McKeown for the Grand Secretary's Office and published by the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of British Columbia and Yukon. The VIEWS AND OPINIONS expressed in the *Masonic Bulletin* are those of the individual authors and writers, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of this Grand Lodge. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions. CORRESPONDENCE: 1495 West Eighth Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia V6H 1C9 Canada. WEB: <http://freemasonry.bcy.ca> TELEPHONE: +1-604-736-8941. FACSIMILE: +1-604-736-5097. EMAIL: editor@freemasonry.bcy.ca

Junior Grand Warden statements of availability



RW Bro Ian Bowman

Born in Scotland in 1951, RW Bro. Ian John Bowman began his career in electrical engineering with the National Coal Board. He and his wife immigrated to British Columbia with their two young children in 1979 and now enjoy two grandchildren. He was Initiated, Passed and Raised in Redwood Lodge No. 193 in Edmonton before returning to British Columbia in 1987.

He affiliated with Langley Lodge No. 184 in 1988, serving as Worshipful Master from 1993 to 1995. He then served as District Education Officer and was appointed District Deputy Grand Master of District 23 in 1997.

As president and owner of SOFTAC Systems and past president of the Western Canadian Export Association he is no stranger to business concepts and the challenges of making sound business decisions. Exposure to both government and private business sectors has broadened his awareness of what it takes to be part of, and to lead, a successful team.

He believes in the solid principles of the fraternity and that the world needs Freemasonry more today than it ever has. He supports the Five Pillar Plan and believes the foundation laid down by the silver and gold through the

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RW Bro. Doug Collins

RW Bro. Douglas Charles Collins was born in Vancouver on 24 April 1948, receiving his education in Prince Rupert, Penticton and Vancouver.

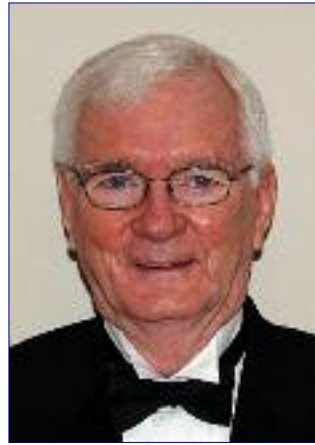
A lifelong broadcaster, he has served in senior management since 1971.

He specializes in communication skills and human resource management, as well as overseeing projects involving new technology in both radio and television as Director of News, Information and Television Operations for the Jim Pattison Broadcast Group in Kamloops.

A strong team player and communicator, he has contributed to a number of City of Kamloops civic committees. In 2008 he was named Broadcaster of the Year by the BC Association of Broadcasters, and was recognized with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Radio-Television News Directors Association of Canada. Coaching many sports, he was named the City of Kamloops Sportsman of the Year in 1984.

RW Bro. Collins was Raised in Kamloops Lodge No. 10 in 1979, serving as Worshipful Master in 2007. He currently serves on three Grand Lodge committees: *ad hoc* Organizational Analysis and Evaluation, Community

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W Bro. Ron Yates

W Bro. Ronald Willam Yates was born in Hamilton, Ontario 17 July 1943, receiving his education in Hamilton and Chilliwack. He served in the Army Medical Corps and with NATO in Germany.

Starting in the funeral industry in Chilliwack, he now owns three funeral homes on Vancouver Island.

He holds a commercial pilot's license with ratings of Multi-Engine, Class 1 Instructor, IFR and Seaplane.

Ron was a Master Counsellor and is a life member of DeMolay. In 1989 he was Raised in Concord Lodge No. 79 in Parksville and became Worshipful Master in 2004-2005. In 2006-2007 he served as Regional Representative for Region 8. He was Worshipful Master in Comox Lodge No. 188 in 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 and in Rainbow Lodge No. 180 in 2010-2011. He's an honorary voting member of Euclid Lodge No. 158 and an affiliate member of Barclay Lodge No. 90, Cumberland Lodge No. 26 and Caribou Lodge No. 4. W Bro Yates is also a York Rite Mason and 32° Scottish Rite Mason.

W Bro. Yates is a past president and life member of the Parksville-Qualicum Shrine Club.

While in Ashcroft, he served

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The chamber of reflection
from page one

process of putrefaction. So must the profane transmute his nature, through a symbolical burial in the chamber, into a new transformed man in the form of an initiate. In alchemy this is called the *Great Work*. Indeed, man's refinement, transmutation and transformation from a brute base metal into gold requires great work! The skull in alchemy, named *caput mortuum*, is the epitome of decline and decay. The crossbones are usually tibias, the weight-bearing bones of the lower legs.

The chunk of bread and the pitcher of water are symbols of simplicity, pointing to the initiate how he should conduct his life. Bread is made of wheat, an element connected to the goddesses Isis and Demeter. Isis is the Egyptian mother goddess and also the goddess of the dead, again, two of the aspects of the Chamber of Reflection.

The bread and water represent the elements necessary to life, but even though food and the material body are indispensable, they remind the candidate that the physical aspect should not be the main objective in one's existence.

Three of the alchemical elements used in the great work were sulphur, salt and mercury, all of which are present in the Chamber of Reflection. Sulphur is symbolical of the spirit, being a masculine principle, referring to enthusiasm and corresponding to the virtue of faith. Salt is a symbol for wisdom, being considered neutral, as far as gender is concerned, referring to pondering and corresponding to the virtue of charity. Mercury appears as the rooster drawn on the wall of the Chamber of Reflection. This animal is connected to the deity Hermes. It is a feminine principle, referring to vigilance

and it also corresponds to faith.

The hourglass is a reminder of mortality. It conveys the meaning that we should make good use of the time given us.

Vitriol is a sulphuric acid or a sulphate used in the alchemical operations of yore. This word is the origin of the adjective vitriolic, meaning caustic or hostile, referring to speech or criticism. However, in the esoteric sense, it is an acronym for the Latin phrase: *Visita interioraterrae, rectificandoque, invenies occultum lapidem*, which means: "visit the interior of the earth, and rectifying it, you will find the hidden stone." Sometimes this acronym appears with the addition of U.M. at the end, which means, *veram medicinam*, the true medicine. If one takes this advice metaphorically, the meaning conveyed is that one must search within oneself, as the truth is hidden there, and this truth is the real solution to our problems.

Besides the profusion of symbols, the candidate will read various sentences on the wall. Most often he will read the following sayings: "If you think we will find out your defects, you will feel uncomfortable among us. If curiosity spurred you towards us, go away. If you are capable of deception, tremble, you will be found out. If you take notice of human differences, leave, we do not know them here. If your soul is fearful, do not proceed! If you persevere, you will be purified, you will overcome darkness, you will be enlightened."

In the Chamber of Reflection, the candidate has time to reconsider his request for admission. If his motives are not pure as admonished by the

Tim Yates Photo



This past March, visitors who came to Concord Lodge No. 79 in Parksville were given a fine dinner of Irish stew, complemented by entertainment by Bro. John Van Egmond of Hiram Lodge No. 14 and his wife, Joanne.

writings on the wall, or if he is fearful and not courageous enough, then he might not be able to keep inviolate the secrets of Freemasonry. Furthermore, solitary in the Chamber of Reflection, the initiate can ponder on the questions presented to him, on his life, and future. Therefore, the reflection to which the title of this Chamber refers, is not just the pondering of the candidate, but primarily the reflection of his inner being.

In another ritual of French origin, the Rectified Scottish Rite, during the first degree initiation, the concept of reflection expressed in the sense of giving back a likeness as in a mirror, is revealed in another way. At the moment the hoodwink is dropped from the candidate's eyes and he sees for the first time the faces of the brethren around him, the Worshipful Master says: "It is not always before oneself, that one finds his enemies. That which is to be feared the most is many times behind oneself.

Turn around!" When the candidate turns, he sees himself in a mirror! Incidentally, the word mirror is, in Latin, *speculum*, deriving from the verb *specular*, which means, to scrutinise. That is exactly what one does in the Chamber of Reflections, as he scrutinises himself and the symbols around him.

Even without going beyond the scope of this exposition, and presenting the rest of the first degree ritual as performed in most countries of the world, you can imagine what an impression this initial part of the ritual makes on a candidate being ushered into our honourable institution. The Chamber of Reflection teaches, indeed, powerful lessons. True initiation is an individual internal process. Nobody can transform a man but himself. Others may guide and help, but ultimately, the individual alone is the only one who can perform the great work. The Chamber of Reflection truly epitomises this process. It is my hope, that those of us, who have not experienced this ritual in our masonic life, have at least derived some small benefit, although vicariously, from this allocation. ■

Excerpted from a paper presented at the Vancouver Grand Masonic Day in 1999.

Nota bene

Grand Lodge Reference Guide

The usual manner of voting known amongst freemasons is by show of hands. (See section R64 of the *Book of Constitutions*.) A vote may be by ballot or show of hands, but a ballot is never by show of hands.

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With grateful thanks...

I've recently had some time to reflect on this wonderful fraternal organization that I have the privilege of belonging to.

It has been 22 years since I first approached the outer door of the lodge, led by my trusted guide. I remember standing in the northeast angle of the lodge when my guide asked me if I had anything to give to charity.

Fast forward to 20 January 2012. For some, this will just be another Friday. For me and 250 fellow employees this will be the day that the sawmill where we worked exploded and was destroyed in a raging fire. Tragically, two of my fellow workers lost their lives in the explosion and nineteen were injured.

To say that I didn't sleep very well that night would be an understatement.

Over the course of the weekend I received numerous emails and phone calls from all across the province. You can imagine that this deep concern for Bro. Brad Kortmeyer's and my health had a very uplifting effect in a very emotional time.

Fast forward one more time to 25 February 2012. This day will be a day that I will remember fondly for the rest of my life. It was the Grand Master's Official Visit to Cariboo District 4 North. To say that I had butterflies in my stomach would be an understatement. Not only was I receiving the Grand Master to our district but in front of a brimming lodge room. (More butterflies and they're increasing by the second).

To say that our Grand Master, MW Bro. William Rutherford Cave, can put anyone at ease with his smile (and wink) would be an understatement. Likewise the Grand Director of Ceremonies, RW Bro. Gary Clark-Marlow and the Grand Marshall, VW Bro. Jim Campbell are of the same nature.

The Brethren of Tweedsmuir Lodge No. 152 were even more surprised when we were presented with donations of money and non-perishable food items from all the brethren present, to distribute to the citizens of Burns Lake.

I would like to thank RW Bro. Mark Donaldson, RW Bro. John Booth, VW Bro. Mike Ragan, W Bro. Dirk Van Ek and W Bro. Ron Yates for making the treacherous journey from District 22 and District 5 to deliver a motorhome full of food and monies from the brethren of these two districts.

I would also like to thank Bro. Kerry Guenter from Omineca Lodge No. 92, the brethren of Kitimat Lodge No. 169, Terrace Lodge No. 123, Mount Begbie Lodge No. 183, Prince George Lodge No. 178, Atlinto Lodge No. 42, Whitehorse Lodge No. 46 and the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon for their kind and generous donations to the citizens of Burns Lake. I would like to apologize now for any brother or lodge that I may have omitted.

As I now start a new career shift after 36 years I would like to thank each and every Freemason in this jurisdiction for their thoughts, prayers, well wishes, handshakes and hugs over the past few months. This is indeed the best fraternity to belong to and I look forward to seeing old friends and meeting many new friends in the years to come.

Right Worshipful Brother Brian Marsh

DDGM, Cariboo District 4N



GRAND MASTER'S ITINERARY MAY 2012

4	F	Dedication Canadian Cancer Society	Prince George
5	S	District 19	Chetwynd No. 187 Chetwynd
10	Th	Centenary	Kootenay No. 15 Revelstoke
11-13	F-Su	125th Anniversary	Mountain No. 11 Golden
14	M	District 9	Prince No.153 Kelowna
17-19	Th-S	Spring Ceremonial Shrine	Nanaimo
24	Th	Crab Night	Joppa No. 112 White Rock
25	F	Grand Lodge Board of General Purposes	Vancouver
25	F	Grand Lodge Principal Officers Meeting	Vancouver
26	S	Research & Education Planning Workshop	Vancouver
27-28	Su-M	Centenary	Eastern Star Kamloops

Grand Lodge candidates from page two

RW Bro. Ian Bowman

Grand Line officers will carry us forward with vision into the future.

He is inspired to seek election as Junior Grand Warden and become part of a team that will move forward, recognizing change as positive growth for the benefit of the craft.

It is his goal to enhance and build on the success of those who have gone before him. ■

RW Bro. Doug Collins

Relations, and Jurisprudence. He was a member of the committee that produced the new Grand Lodge DVD and co-chaired the successful Grand Lodge Communication in Kamloops in 2010. He has also served as Regional Representative for Region 2. He was appointed District Deputy Grand Master for District 3 in 2010.

RW Bro. Collins married Susan in 1971 and they have two sons, a daughter and three grandchildren. ■

RW Bro. Ron Yates

as a volunteer firefighter and

an alderman. In Parksville, he is a life member in the Royal Canadian Legion having served as an officer for 15 years, three of them as president. He has been a member of the Lions Club, Rotary, Chamber of Commerce and the Hospice Society.

Married to Jo-Anne, they have a blended family of four sons, three daughters and seven grandchildren. ■



Thanks to a donation from the BC Masonic Foundation, 'Mason', currently with his puppy trainer learning basic obedience and socialization, will enter advanced training as a guide dog later this summer. This is the third dog that we have contributed towards training