

I HAVE IT! The Big Fat Surprise: A Book Review
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I have it! -- the famous claim of the Senior Overseer in the ritual of the Mark Master Degree. I, too, have it – not as Grand Lecturer, or PGHP, but simply as an interested Companion. I have recently discovered the answer to the question that has plagued us all for decades: What is the problem with our membership and our attendance?

First, both problems are related, I believe. If our members showed up more frequently, attended our meetings and participated (even just as sideliners), they as a group would be more effective in bringing in new members. In other words, membership growth would be the result of greater attendance by current members. And so we talk a lot about making our meetings more interesting, for “retention” purposes. But I believe that our members do understand the value of attendance -- just to be a part of the opening and closing of our Chapters and Lodges; just to hear the prayers; just to be reminded of their own initiation experiences. If this is true, why do they drop out and not come back to help build the Chapter or Lodge? They obviously do retain a sense of value in their membership because they keep paying dues, but why do so many not come back – 80% to 90%?? Some move out of the area, some take dimitts, but most don’t – they just won’t or don’t come to the meetings.

The *standard* answer is two-fold, and it is WRONG! We don’t make our meetings interesting (how often have you heard that old trope about reading the minutes, paying the bills, and going home – I say that that is enough, if the opening and closing ritual is good); and we are in competition with TV, Movies, Concerts, athletic events as participant or observer, travel, and so forth. I am convinced that neither of these answers is a satisfactory explanation why our brethren and companions won’t come to just one meeting each month.

The real answer lies in NUTRITION, or lack thereof; the answer lies in WHAT WE EAT! It lies in the quality or nature of what we eat. Let me explain. Most of America is in thrall to the High Carbohydrate Diet, rich in: Sugar, White Flour and other starches, and High Fructose Corn Syrup. Many in America avoid FAT in their diet, but THE BIG FAT SURPRISE is that “Butter, Meat and Cheese belong in a Healthy Diet.” This is the title and subtitle of a recently released book by Nina Teicholz – an eye-opener to the consequences of the High-Carb diet on American life, in general. In short, replacing the Fats in our diet with Carbs has led to a deleterious increase in Insulin, which traps the fatty acids in our adipose tissue, in order to control our blood sugar level. The long-term, direct effect is weight gain, obesity, and diabetes. These problems and diseases are epidemic, as widely reported! Indirectly, Heart Disease and Cancer can be tied back to the dietary choices for excess Carbs that we make. This same thesis was expounded in 2002 by Gary Taubes in an article in the New York Review of Books: “What if it’s all been a

Big Fat Lie?” In 2007, he followed the article with a book titled GOOD CALORIES, BAD CALORIES. To be brief, the LIE is that a High-Carb diet is to be preferred to a High-Fat diet. In fact, it turns out that Dr. Atkins was right after all! The major consequence of Public Health policy over the last several decades is a marked imbalance in the average American diet – and this Truth must apply to large sub-groups of the overall American population, as well as to the country as a whole: sub-groups like the Freemasons, York Rite Masons, Scottish Rite Masons, Shriners, Eastern Star brothers and Sisters, the Elks, the Moose, and so forth. None are exempt from the daily consequences of the Carb-Load. As I understand the metabolic realities, Carb-loaders are not satiated for very long, so they are constantly hungry and consequently eating. Over time, the high insulin levels, and the insulin-resistance that develops, lead to disease and ‘unwellness’. And so, over time, our members don’t feel like coming out: They prefer to stay home, eating more like as not because the carbs don’t satisfy, and nursing their illnesses. Our dismal attendance and paltry growth numbers are not the result of a loss of interest by our members, otherwise many would take dimits. They don’t come out because they just don’t feel like it, when it is time to come to the meeting. We are jeopardized in many instances by last minute choices of our members who are struggling with incipient health issues – choices to stay home rather than venture out.

Don’t take my word for the dietary effects on our organizations. I recommend to you a couple of very well-researched books, any one of which will give you a fascinating understanding of the development of Public Health Policy in this country over the last 60 years, since Eisenhower’s heart attack in 1954. *The revelations as to how Bad Science has trumped Good Science to give us dietary recommendations that are bad for our health is truly amazing.* I include another must read: “GRAIN BRAIN: THE SURPRISING TRUTH ABOUT WHEAT, CARBS AND SUGAR – YOUR BRAIN’S SILENT KILLER” so that you will consider the consequences to your overall health of gluten in combination with carbs. The following are all available on Amazon:

- 1. THE BIG FAT SURPRISE: BUTTER, MEAT AND CHEESE BELONG IN A HEALTHY DIET, Nina Teichholz, 2014**
- 2. GOOD CALORIES, BAD CALORIES, Gary Taubes, 2007**
- 3. FAT CHANCE: BEATING THE ODDS AGAINST SUGAR, Robert Lustig, 2013**
- 4. GRAIN BRAIN: THE SURPRISING TRUTH ABOUT WHEAT, CARBS AND SUGAR – YOUR BRAIN’S SILENT KILLER, Dr. David Perlmutter, 2011**

If my connection between our poor diets and the choices made by our brothers and sisters to avoid attendance is correct, then the fix is obvious:

- 1. Personal dietary improvements, giving up the predominance of sugar, starch and gluten in your diet**

2. **Serving different (i.e., low-carb) meals at our meetings**
3. **Offering alternative, non-sugary desserts**

YOU will feel better and our Members will feel better, and they will once again want to contribute more actively to society via their Masonic activities.