

B.P.O.E. 145<sup>th</sup> Grand Lodge Session  
Portland, Oregon  
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*Address of William B. Airey*

*CEO & Director General of Moose International & The Loyal Order of Moose*

Grand Exalted Ruler Paul Helsel, Grand Secretary Bryan Klatt, officers of the Grand Lodge and members all - it is indeed an honor and privilege to be invited to speak to this distinguished gathering.

I am proud to stand before you as an Elk of 20 years good standing. I joined Aurora, Illinois Lodge in 1989 and was transferred into Brother Klatt's Lodge, DeKalb Lodge No. 765 when Aurora closed. What a great job the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks are doing throughout America! How could anyone not be proud to be an Elk?

I had the opportunity to attend the convention in Dallas some years back when I was the Director of Membership for the Loyal Order of Moose, and enjoyed attending the sessions of the convention. Unfortunately my schedule has not permitted me to return until this year, and, after arriving yesterday, this will be the only session I can attend – heading directly for the airport upon the completion of my remarks to head back to Chicago and then on to Florida for a meeting of the Moosehaven Board of Directors. I do, very much, appreciate the opportunity to address this assemblage.

We just held our 121<sup>st</sup> International Convention of the Moose fraternity in Chicago six weeks ago, and I had the responsibility of delivering the keynote address at the

opening. It was rough. I had to deliver the message that we had experienced one of the toughest years of our existence. Our investment portfolio had taken a hit of 71 million dollars during the year. Fortunately the equity markets have somewhat stabilized and our net loss at this time is far less.

It is during these times that we realize the importance of dedicated members. We had hit them with the biggest single increase in per capita in our history; many Lodges had to pass on the increase by raising dues – in many cases not by just a few dollars. It wasn't easy. We eliminated many positions, cut salaries of staff and froze salaries of others. We cut spending big time – without cutting service to our children at Mooseheart and our senior members at Moosehaven; and we made it through the year successfully.

We had the biggest membership production in the final month of our fiscal year in thirty-four years! Member donations to Moose Charities increased over the previous year, even with the economy in the shape that it was. We were able to take what could have been a disastrous story and turn it into another chapter in our history of success because of members who believe in caring for others.

For forty-five years I have taken pride in calling myself a fraternalist, only to find out that there is no such thing – at least not according to Webster's Dictionary; and spell check in my computer. No such thing! Can you believe it?

Yes, I found the word fraternal; “of, or relating to brothers; relating to or constituting a fraternity.” It's an adjective – the noun being fraternalism and the adverb being fraternally.

I also found the word fraternity; “A body of people associated for a common interest or purpose.” But no “fraternalist”. It just can’t be!

I thought I even knew the definition – “fraternalist; one who practices the principles and precepts of a fraternal Order; who works with others of one’s kind to aid the less fortunate”. It would be a noun.

How then should we refer to the millions of men and women who belong to fraternal organizations - and who practice a way of life that is so beneficial to society and to all humanity? Certainly they are more than just volunteers. They do so much more than give of their time, or their talent, or their personal finances.

They do indeed live a life of doing something good for those less fortunate; of helping those in need; of looking after a fellow member and his or her family; of being of service to their country and their community; of serving their family and their God.

As members of a fraternal organization, we take and keep an oath; we make a commitment; we fulfill a pledge; we believe in personal sacrifice for the betterment of humanity – and we ask nothing in return!

There are those who laugh at us and make fun of the men and women who join our organizations. However, none of them laugh at the programs we sponsor - or the projects we complete, or the thousands of lives we make better. Little do they know!

There are those who are afraid of us. They refer to us as members of ‘secret societies’ or ‘cults’. Little are they aware that many of them personally benefit from what we do for the community in which they live and raise their families.

There are those who shy away from us; politicians who are afraid that someone might connect them to an organization that is selective in whom they invite to become members. Let me ask you this - why would anyone running for political office not want to belong to an organization that has the betterment of the community and its residents as its basic reason for existence?

There are those – and many of them – who have no idea who we are, what we do and why their community is better off because we exist.

Why are the news media so curiously determined to run their annual story of how the Elks, Eagles and Moose are on the way out? Usually this is a major story – sometimes the lead story in the Sunday magazine section of the local newspaper. You think people read it? Sure they do. Do they believe it? Unfortunately, for the most part, yes they do. Could the press have utilized that same space to let their readership know how important it is that these fraternal organizations continue the good work they do for the community; even taken the space to review what has been done locally during the past year because of their existence? They could – but they generally don't.

The irony of it all is that local government certainly knows how important we are to society and to the community. While the Elks concentrate on the United States of America, the Moose have tried to make an impact in Canada, Great Britain and Bermuda as well. While not achieving the success story we would like, folks in other countries have made contact with us. We have heard from Russia, Germany, Australia, Mexico, along with countries in Africa, and numerous others. We have actually received letters from local governments in several

of these countries, asking what they would have to do in order to have our organization established there – because of what it can mean to their communities and to their citizens. Because of language barriers, laws regarding right to assemble, and numerous administrative and logistical nightmares, etc., we have, so far, not attempted to move our program into these countries, but the fact is that we are wanted by governments throughout the world.

Why then, when we ask for some consideration for our local Lodges, for example relief from real estate tax, do most state and local governments here in the United States turn a deaf ear? Why can't we communicate and work more efficiently with our City officials?

I don't have the answers to these questions. I do know that we are attempting to work closely together with other fraternal Orders. Within the last two years we have held three two-day meetings comprised of fraternal and veteran organizations. The first was hosted by the Fraternal Order of Eagles in Columbus, Ohio, the second was hosted by the Loyal Order of Moose at Mooseheart, Illinois, the third was hosted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Kansas City and the next meeting is, to the best of my knowledge, to be hosted by the Elks in Chicago.

How great it is to sit down with the leadership of the Elks, Eagles, Moose, American Legion, VFW, and others to discuss the common problems we share in serving our communities, operating our social centers and building membership. It might not surprise you to learn that we all face very similar challenges. While we are headed in the right direction, we have a long way to go!

Isn't it great what we, as Elks, have been able to accomplish with the few, the proud and the active? I faithfully read the *Elks Magazine* each time it arrives at my home. I look forward to learning the latest achievements of the Elks Veterans Programs, Scholarships, Hoop Shoots, Drug Awareness, Youth Activities, etc. These are the reasons why I belong!

This fraternity's mission is profound – “to inculcate the principles of Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love and Fidelity; to recognize a belief in God; to promote the welfare and enhance the happiness of its Members; to quicken the spirit of American patriotism; to cultivate good fellowship; to perpetuate itself as a fraternal organization, and to provide for its government, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the United States of America will serve the people and communities through benevolent programs, demonstrating that *Elks Care and Elks Share.*”  
Wow!

With all this being said, what is my purpose of speaking with you this morning? Simply this; the days of the fraternal orders are not coming to an end. As a matter of fact, our greatest days should lie just ahead! It would only make sense that with state and local governments cutting back on social service programs, because of lack of revenue, once again society will look to fraternal orders, service clubs and churches to pick up the slack. We certainly filled this need before there were programs such as social security, Medicare, Medicaid, aid to dependent children, welfare, etc. And we're still here - ready to do it again. Because that's what we do – look after those in need!

Be proud of what you – what we - believe in. The Elks do, in fact, make a difference! Be proud of your accomplishments – because you have, in many various ways, made life just a little better than it was, for so many. Be proud that you're a member – it's a great statement of your character. Be proud of the example you have set for others – it's an example that should be set day after day after day.

So what if Webster doesn't have a definition for the word 'fraternalist'. I couldn't care less. I wake up every morning knowing that I have, in some way, made life a little easier for someone less fortunate; I know that in one way or another, I will, today, do some good thing for someone; that I will have made my community a better place to raise my family; that I believe in a Supreme Being and worship as my conscience dictates, and I allow others the same freedom.

If I believe that makes me a fraternalist - then that is what I am – and I am damned proud of it. You should be too! Let's keep doing what we've been doing so well as Elks for over 140 years. But - let's remember to share that pride by inviting others to join with us in all the good that we do throughout this great land we call home – the United States of America.

Have a great day, and an even greater convention!