

The Storm

Whilst this winter has not been as severe as others, I have recently experienced a hard frost that brought back to me a story that my mother told many years ago. Her father, my maternal Grandfather was a Freemason at the St Bathans Lodge Central Otago.

The winter of 1920 I was told was especially severe in Central Otago, moreover the tiny settlement of Drybread did not escape the heavy fall of snow and the eventual ice cap.

It was in these conditions that twin boys were born, premature. The house had no heating other than what was provided by the ubiquitous Shacklock Orion coal range. The mid-wife knew the premature babies would not survive unless they had constant and steady supply of warmth.

She saw the coal range as their incubator, there was nothing else; they would surely die in the extreme cold. The mid-wife suggested they be placed in the coal range oven. This would require constant monitoring of the heat 24 hours per day, and that demanded responsibility. Plenty of people to make it happen.

My Grandfather being a neighbour heard of the manpower plight and quickly put in train a roster of Freemasons, their wives and neighbours who all joined in the monitoring of the babies 24 hours per day. I was told many walked many miles across the snow to the homestead to perform this life saving act.

The baby's survived and grew into strong men surviving well into their 80's. I have actually met them.

It is a wonderful story of human endurance, of survival, of community spirit and neighbours being neighbourly and the local Lodge being seen to expose their tenet of service.

Following a storm in Auckland several months ago, the news covering the event caused me to shake my head as the TV interviewer asked a lady beside her badly damaged home. "How did she manage to get along without power for 48 hours? Yes two days without power. The lady smiled and told the interviewer that she was a country girl and knew how to survive. She knew how to cook a meal and live until the cavalry arrived. That flick of spirit confused the TV interviewer who simply could not continue with any further questions. She was knocked off her perch with the simplest of replies. Adversity was a challenge not a problem so what if she did not have power, "there were others worse off." Came the reply.

Today we have a large number of agencies established to assist those in need. One of them is the benevolence of a Freemasons' Lodge. The trouble as I see it, few people know of its existence unless they are introduced to the convenor. We seem to miss out on all media coverage, never mentioned not even in dispatches.

Perhaps the Speak Up Campaign will tell people who we are and put our name in the forefront of their mind and make a call on us. But in saying this as Freemasons we need to be aware of situations that require our aid then, maybe, just maybe; we are worthy of comment.

That is when the meek, and unprotected require sustenance, succours and financial help then it will become our finest hour.

Warren Duff