

# Fellowship

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Gladwell, in his book *Outliers*, describes a most interesting community of Roseto, Pennsylvania where 10 Italian men and 1 boy arrived in 1882 to work in the slate quarry. During the next 12 years the community grew quickly. 1200 Italians applied for passports to immigrate to America in 1894.

The community was named after the town in Italy called Roseto and was located close to Bangor (settled by the English) and a nearby community of Nazareth (settled by the Germans). Due to previous racial tensions and language differences, the people of Roseto became a close knit community.

In 1896 a dynamic priest came to Roseto. He developed spiritual societies and organized festivals. He encouraged gardening and the raising of their own animals. The community came alive as "schools, a park, a convent, and a cemetery were built." Shops, bakeries and restaurants appeared as did a dozen or so factories. Indeed a well established, self sufficient community was established.

In the 1950s the local physician indicated that very few Rosetans under the age of 65 had heart disease. Due to the very high level of heart disease at that time in the United States physicians from Oklahoma set this community up as a research project to investigate the reasons for better heart health there, with the goal of correcting the national level of heart disease so rampant at that time.

They found in their investigation that there was no heart disease in those under 55 years of age and in men over 65 the death rate from heart disease was half the level in the U.S. In fact the death level from all causes in Roseto was 30 – 35 percent lower than expected. "There was no suicide, no alcoholism, no drug addiction, and very little crime. They didn't have anyone on welfare. Then they looked at peptic ulcers. They didn't have any of those either. These people were dying of old age. That's it." Disease and causes of death in nearby Bangor and Nazareth were the same as for the rest of the US.

Statistically this community would be described as an outlier. Why?

Their diet in the US had slipped with the use of lard instead of olive oil, the pizza had more fats, the sweets that they occasionally enjoyed in Italy were now standard with every meal. They didn't do Yoga or jog or exercise and many were heavy smokers and were struggling with obesity. Rosetans from Italy living in other parts of the US had the same health issues and death statistics as the other Americans. Since their good health was not connected with diet, exercise, genes or location it had to be Roseto itself.

They found in Roseto that it was common for residents to gather on street corners to visit; they often had backyard gatherings and cookouts. They observed that often 3 generations lived in one house and grandparents were respected. They regularly attended church. There were 22 separate civic organizations in a town of just under 2,000 residents. Also they found an "egalitarian ethos of the community, which discouraged the wealthy from flaunting their success and helped the unsuccessful obscure their failures."

The researchers referred to their findings of the residents of Roseto as magical. It appeared to them that the level of good health and longevity was related to community. The benefits came from “the mysterious and magical benefits of people stopping to talk to one another on the street and of having three generations under one roof.”

Why would I spend time describing to you the community of Roseto? It seems odd to compare Roseto to Masonry however I believe that there are several similarities and we as Masons could draw from their experience. We are a close knit community of men who believe in fellowship. Getting together to visit, to share our ideals and to promote brotherhood is important to every Mason. We practice taking care of each other in times of difficulty and treat each other as equals.

Are we, as Masons, healthier than the average Canadian? Do we live longer than the average age of Canadians? It would be logical to me if in fact we, like the residents of Roseto, do have better health and live longer. I believe that these questions could indeed make a wonderful research project.

Since fellowship for the Rosetans appears to be at the root of their good health could we as Masons improve our health by more and better fellowship. In 1717, one of the two reasons for the four lodges to organize as a Grand Lodge was to rejuvenate the quarterly feast, which I would suggest was about fellowship. Several of the lodges in our district have a banquet before their regular meetings, while others get together once a week or more often and others have regular breakfast gatherings. In every case these lodges are either growing or have fewer asking for demits. They are truly enjoying good quality fellowship.

I would suggest that Masons in general and those Masons who belong to weaker lodges in particular could receive many unexpected benefits from improved fellowship. Originality is required to spike one’s interest and to keep our brethren coming out to events of fellowship. Who would think that work parties or fund raising by running a booth at a community event could provide fellowship? It can and it does!

In the mid 1700s the membership of most lodges was small. This appeared to be of little concern. However getting together as Masons for a feast and fellowship on regular basis was important. In the 1930s through the 1950s large numbers of men joined the Masonic order. The number of initiations, passings and raisings must have put a large work load on every lodge. During that time, due to the pressures of ritual, did we let slip the feasts and the fellowship which was one of the most important aspects of Masonry? It would also appear that in our current society using digital technology to communicate we have lost the personal face-to-face touch that humans need.

Let me leave you with this thought, would many of our concerns with Masonry today disappear if we were to concentrate on how to improve the fellowship in Masonry? Like the residents of Roseto, Pennsylvania, if we were to improve our level of fellowship, would we also improve our health and longevity? My answer would be, yes!

Outliers, The Story of Success – Malcolm Gladwell

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