

Many years ago, I was visiting Fresno Lodge when they presented a special walking cane to a Past Master who had recently acquired the title of Senior Past Master. During this non-ritual ceremony, they said that the oldest Past Master, by year of being Master, is given a particular cane to have and hold until he passed away and then his successor would be presented with it. I presume that the cane is a symbol of old age and certainly a Senior Past Master would probably be old.

When I was raised in 1968, I remember looking at our Past Master's pictures in the card room with a list of our deceased Past Masters and determined that Richard Hargrave, our Master in 1954, was our oldest living Past Master. Unfortunately, I never saw Bro Hargrave in Lodge even though he did not pass away until 1978.

My calculations show that Robert Larsen Sr. who was Master in 1965, held that distinction for several years before he died in 2010. Leonard Gottner would have then received that distinction as he was our Master in 1968. Bro Leonard held that title until this February 17th when he passed away. Brother Len would have held that title for 14 years and have been a Past Master for 55 years and just over a year away from being a 75 year Mason.

Worshipful Gottner was raised in Libertas Lodge No. 466 in Bakersfield on April 18, 1950. He then moved to the Fresno area where he joined Center Lodge No. 465 and after that moved to Tulare County where he joined Lindsay Lodge No. 416. Upon his return to Fresno, he joined Las Palmas Lodge. His ritual was always perfect and as Master, his 3rd degree lecture occasionally included a recitation of all of the monitorial work.

He worked for Reynolds Aluminum as an office manager and an assistant branch manager. In 1973, his job moved him to the State of Washington where he took dual membership with Des Moines Lodge No. 245 in Des Moines, Washington. He served that Lodge actively and the Washington Grand Lodge as Deputy of the Grand Master (2-year appointment), Grand Chaplain, Grand Orator, Grand Marshall, and Jr. Grand Deacon. He might have been elected Grand Master in Washington, but was denied that honor because he was not a Past Master in Washington.

Brother Gottner was also very active in the Order of the Eastern Star in both Fresno and Des Moines, WA. He has been the Worthy Patron of several Washington Chapters a total of 16 times, including 2012. He served as Worthy Grand Patron of Washington for the year 1993-94.

Brother Gottner attended Las Palmas after serving as Master until moving to the State of Washington. I know of one occasion when he came back to visit us at Las Palmas Lodge. During the pandemic, he joined us on one of our Skype stated meetings.

After the passing of his first wife, he met a lady at an Eastern Star dinner and the two of them got married. Unfortunately, she passed away from a brain tumor within the first year of their marriage. Brother Len was 95 years old when he passed away.

I am sure that you are curious as to who is our current Senior Past Master. Well, it is me and while I do not want nor need a cane, I do want to be a Senior Past Master for at least 14 years and a Past Master for over 50 years. At the 14-year mark, I will be 94 years old.

Like Bro Gottner who continued to give the 3rd degree lecture at his Lodge in Washington until just a couple of years ago, I continue to give the 3rd degree lecture at Las Palmas-Ponderosa Lodge.

