

PICKING SUNFLOWERS, RIGHT PAST THE YELLOW SCHOOL BUS
By Frater James Marples, VII°

Anyone who has ever studied the history of the various States in the Union probably knows that the State nickname of Kansas is "the Sunflower State," and the State Flower is none other than the sunflower. Also, anyone who grew up in Kansas has most likely heard teachers lecture on the importance of the State flower. Often, instructors take their classes outdoors for field days and show children exactly what the State flower looks like. Afterwards, the teacher might assign each student to pick his or her very own sunflower and bring it to school the next day. The teachers explain how the head of the sunflower ---in some instances; not always --- makes a daily trek facing toward the sun as it goes across the sky. It is often truly amazing for a young person to see a plant change its position without man's help. It is almost as if the sunflower has a mind of its own. Some of the children think it is gravity; others think it is magic. Actually, it is the absence of light and the receiving of light which plays a large role in the life and the growth of this flower.

Years went on, new things were learned in school, but the sunflower still reappeared on schedule brightening everyone's day. When I had attained the proper age, I wanted to join the Order of DeMolay, and what Chapter did I join? Sunflower Chapter of the Order of DeMolay, in Wichita, Kansas. I did not join this Chapter merely because of its name ---because other factors were considered -- but after joining this particular Chapter, I again realized the importance of the sunflower.

By joining Sunflower Chapter of DeMolay, it was another learning process --meeting new people with new ideas. It was the first encounter with a fraternal organization composed of boys who were guided and inspired by Masons. Lasting friendships were made between the Masons and the DeMolays; in addition to the many things accomplished, there were numerous lessons learned by all parties.

A few years later, when I had again reached the proper age, I joined Sunflower Lodge # 86, A:.F:. & A:.M:., of Wichita, Kansas, which was the same Lodge that my father had joined as well as a distant cousin. It was a great, almost majestic experience. There I found many more friends, men who were both good friends and good Masons. They cared about their Symbolic Lodge as well as the other local Lodges, the Scottish Rite and York Rite, and other Masonic organizations.

A Lodge is similar to a sunflower in these respects. A sunflower has petals pointing in different directions but is united at the center base -- which forms the stem. A Lodge has members represented by the petals pointing in different directions which symbolize their different walks of life. The center base forming the stem which unites, is comparable to the unifying force of Freemasonry.

As we learned in school: the face of the sunflower may (or may not) tilt toward the sun. But the head of the sunflower does rely on sunlight depending on the degree of further light needed for growth. In a similar (yet different) way, Masons engage in either learning Masonic precepts or endeavoring to pass these honorable principles on to others. Not all Masons face toward officer chairs; many are side-liners who observe. Some Masons may face toward verbal Oratory; while others may face toward scholarly Research. It's not all receiving; but giving of your time, talents and trustworthiness to be a member of a fraternal and benevolent organization which transforms solemn mutual promises into dependable friendships. Virtually every Mason is in an ongoing stage of "growth." One doesn't receive all the degrees and you're finished. Masonic Light radiates when good men apply moral ethics in their daily lives.

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I saw sunflowers even before my first day at school. What I remember most about my public school days in Rose Hill, Kansas, is color. Throughout kindergarten and elementary school, we used color --- crayons, markers, pens, pencils --- to draw pictures and tell stories.



In mathematics, we used color to distinguish mathematics from subtraction, multiplication, and division.

In English, we used one color for nouns, another for verbs, and a bright green for adjectives since they are what bring life and emphasis to a sentence.

Later in vocational shop in high school, color indicated steps in flow-charts outlining the progress of our various projects; and red was always used for warning labels to indicate hazardous substances, situations, and areas.

By using color; the teachers could teach more effectively.

There is one color that really stands out from my childhood --- yellow. It was the color of the school bus. Although I lived just next door to the school and didn't ride the bus daily, I watched the fleet of school busses go past our home thousands of times and relished all the more the few times I could ride the school bus on relatively rare occasions (for me) when we went on field trips to special places or to athletic events in neighboring towns. The color of the school bus closely resembled the yellow sunflowers along the roadside and the golden glow of wheat ripening in adjacent farm fields.

Most of the school busses I am familiar with were (and are) diesel-powered. Some are International engines; and some are Cummins engines. I admire the long "Blue Bird Corporation" busses, which I understand are 72-passenger busses. Thousands of school districts across our nation have "bus barns" which house, service, and maintain these modern conveyances for millions of our school children. The driver whom I was most accustomed to, at the Unified School District #394 in my then hometown of Rose Hill, Kansas, was Illustrious Brother Elvin S. Cox, 33^o. He was a friend, a neighbor, and a dependable man who made sure the school busses operated at all times --- in every kind of weather. When he drove the school bus, he kept a keen eye on the road, a firm grip on the steering-wheel, and a caring attitude in his heart for all his passengers. I admire him and all the countless Brother Masons who have been school bus drivers.

Our Rosicrucian Society founded by Father Christian Rosenkretz was founded partly as an Educational Society; partly as a Philosophical Society; and partly as a Healing Society. Fr. Rosenkretz and the members of the Society of the Rose and Cross made extensive study of the four main elements of nature: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. In many respects, the yellow school bus with its four-cycle internal combustion engine ---- utilizing the principles of: intake, compression, power, and exhaust, ---- is highly illustrative of the elements working in unison. The bus motor relies on intake of air; the tires touch the earth via the roadway; the engine cooling system keeps constant via a water/antifreeze mixture; and literally the "spark" of fire ignites the fuel in a compressed atmosphere producing power and thrust.

Young minds and bodies have been transported to schools (as places of learning). And, yet, the mode of transportation is a learning adventure in itself. Modern busses have the latest state-of-the-art communications with two-way radios, cell-phones, Global Positioning Satellite navigation technology, onboard cameras for monitoring student behavior on the bus, as well as helping drivers see behind the bus if the transmission is geared into; 'Reverse.' First-aid equipment aboard can meet basic medical needs. The ultimate responsibility and prime force for the proper operation and safety of the bus and its occupants remains with: the Driver.

School bus drivers must mesh well with other drivers, and pedestrians in obeying the "rules of the road." But, the driver must also utilize his human eye to react to unforeseen situations and/or steer clear of objects/obstacles which may cross in his the path. The school busses are equipped with headlights, tail-lights, flashers, and retractable stop-sign to make each "run" a safe journey.



School busses and sunflowers, indeed, are objects which are easily seen on the horizon. Both are vital to our world. And, both have multiple uses for which we need to be grateful. Let us continue our study of such usefulness.

SOURCES / RECOMMENDED READINGS :

Picking Sunflowers: The New Age Magazine (now called The Scottish Rite Journal). The Supreme Council, 33^o of the Southern Jurisdiction USA, February 1984 issue.

My Yellow School Bus: The Scottish Rite Journal. The Supreme Council, 33^o of the Southern -----

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