

ORANGE PEEL

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TRADITION

As the sun breaks over the Rocky Mountains, clumps of heavy wet snow begin to fall from the boughs of trees, and birds awake and begin their morning song. It's going to be a cool sunny day, and a young family filled with excitement heads to the mountains to partake in one of America's oldest traditions, harvesting their family Christmas tree. As they arrive, they head out in search of the perfect tree; the children are laughing & playing while making their way through deep snow. It doesn't take long before they find their perfect family Christmas tree.

As the rest of the family looks on, the Dad begins to chop and chop away at the base of this very tall western pine tree, making slow progress due to its size. The mother questions the size and thinks that this perfect tree may be too tall and too large to fit in the home, nevertheless the Dad continues to harvest this magnificent holiday icon. After several minutes, which seemed like hours, the time has come for this beautiful giant to fall, the family watches with eyes wide open as the sounds of fracturing tree fibers begin to snap and pop. The tree begins to lean and gains speed as it falls towards the snow-covered ground. Smack! The tree crashes, and joy and excitement are overcome by fear, embarrassment, and an overwhelming feeling of failure. The tree, which was merely feet off of the side of the snow covered road, fell directly over the front windshield of the family station wagon. The windshield was cracked, paint was scratched, and of course a nice dent in the hood. The worst part is the youngest of the children was only inches from the oversized tree, and no doubt would have been hurt if struck by it.

So ask yourself....is this event a poor tradition or is this event the result of poor tactics? Brothers and Sisters, in the recent past I have been witness to one too many statements trashing the traditions that have made us who we are today. I would like to shed some light on the subject, spark some good conversation, and with great hope, maybe educate some of those who signed on for what seems to be a 30 year ride on the turnout coattails of those that aren't here for just the sticker in the windshield. It was just the other day I had an officer make a statement about the FOOLS, almost as if he was trolling for a conflict, which of course, I took the bait. A negative statement was made about how the FOOLS associate themselves with tradition, and tradition is what gets Firemen killed. This isn't the first time I have heard this statement. So, I lay down some cover fire, make a couple of near disciplinary statements and make my way out of the area.

I immediately prepare for a future discussion while I brush up on the exact definition of tradition in the dictionary, hoping to find overwhelming ammunition to use in my future offensive attack defending my chapter and beliefs. First and foremost, I always say, “Don’t confuse tradition with poor tactics.”

Tra-di-tion = 1. The handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information, etc., from generation to generation, esp. by word of mouth or by practice; *a story that has come down to us by popular tradition.*

Well there you have it, ok, so I guess if a particular organization continuously partakes in poor tactics and poor decision making, then I guess they have created their own traditions....by definition. Personally, I prefer to view tradition as a positive, a word that represents the hard work those that came before us had to endure. Those that paved the path to make this career what it is today. A word that reminds us why we wear our uniform, the badge on our chest, the color of our engines, the cleaning of our apparatus, the bugles, the unions, the competitive nature, and how certain common tools came to be part of our inventory.

Anyone who is familiar with the FOOLS understands what tradition means to us. Those that make statements against our organization, without an ounce of understanding, are clearly confused with what our organization is all about. FOOLS are not just all about tradition; however we do celebrate and embrace it with open arms. If tradition is what gets Firemen killed, and tradition is indicative of a stagnant way of thinking accompanied by close-mindedness, then I am confused. We may want to take a look at the information being presented at major venues/conferences and state training facilities right here in our own backyard.

Why? You may ask....because there are several FOOLS who instruct at our State Fire Training Academy, there are FOOLS presenting at all major educational conferences across the entire United States. Locally, why is it that some of the most highly requested, highly sought after hands on training courses offered in our state are offered by FOOLS? The answer is simple, FOOLS are passionate about their careers, passionate about sharing information, keeping firefighters safe, and passionate about honoring those that made all of this possible. We do this, all the while embracing and celebrating the traditions which again, have made us who we are today.

I am sure it is safe to say that those that throw around “tradition” as if it is a word of disappointment to describe poor tactics and decision making couldn’t explain why their uniforms are blue and not red, why the Maltese Cross is a symbol of the fire service, or why the term “runs” is used to describe number of calls. Nor do they know how morning work-outs came about, why we wear badges, why illuminated red lights are outside of our fire houses, why new apparatus are “pushed back” into the bay, and.... on... and... on... and... on. In fact I bet it is safe to say they couldn’t even describe the history of their own fire department. In the words of a highly respected man, Chief Lasky, “Big hat, no cattle.” I am sure we all know someone like this.

I really don't think it is necessary to outlaw utilizing the Christmas tree as an icon for the Holidays, especially just because some MUTT smashed the old "family truckster." However I do believe it is necessary to LEARN FROM IT and understand why that family was there to begin with.

Take the time to understand what the word means to the fire service, talk to some "Crusty Old Jake," read a few books, or for God's sake Google it!!! You just might find it interesting.