

# Proud to be a Bricklayer

Masonry is hard work, an art form, and a mystery.

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I am proud to be an American. I like to see the American flag majestically waving on high. I enjoy singing a rousing chorus of "The Star Spangled Banner" (though not very well) at sporting events. I have had the privilege of working on many of the U.S. military bases in Washington State, and have heard the jubilant roar of freedom from the jet engines of our military aircraft as they practice or head out to far-away lands.

I am equally as proud to be a bricklayer. I will never forget the cartoon I once saw depicting a larger than life, strong burly man, walking down the sidewalk. He had on a knee-length leather coat with a fur collar and cuffs, fine suede hat tilted just right, and big Cuban cigar between his teeth. Running in front of him was his bodyguard, Uzi in hand, shouting, "Out of the way, the bricklayer is coming through."

Bricklaying is not just a job, it's a vocation. It's an art form. Sure, there are some average bricklayers and some exceptional ones, just like in any other profession. There are also average jobs and exceptional ones, but more times than not, John Q. Public will look at a masonry project and say, "Wow, I wish I could do that."

Our craft has the stigma of being "very hard work." There is a lot of training and practice involved in becoming a good, efficient bricklayer. The training and practice really never end. It is sometimes wet, cold, hot, dusty, and dirty work. Many times the products we work with are very heavy, but the end result and pride that are felt when the project is completed are well worth the effort.

If it were easy, everyone would do it. I don't have to even do the project to feel a sense of pride when I look at exceptional brickwork. I have the sense that "this is great work, and I could have done that if I had been asked."

There is a bond or band of brotherhood amongst bricklayers. After all, masonry started with the secret society of free masons. You had to be invited and allowed to join the club before you were taught the trade and, of course, the secret handshake.

There is still a little bit of that hidden mystery running through the bricklayer's veins. The mystery of knowing the mortar consistency needed for various materials just by look and feel. The secret to laying out a herringbone firebox so the cut pieces are all the same size, and it flows from the back around to the sides.

It may not be mysteries and secrets so much as training and experience. When I meet a fellow bricklayer for the first time, there is this feeling of pride in the handshake that says, "Yeah, I know the secret."

Masonry has a proud tradition, and I am proud of my trade. I hope that all bricklayers feel as I do. So don your hat and fine leather coat and walk the streets proudly, for a bricklayer is coming through.