



President's Message June/July 2021

My Brothers, I am honored and humbled to be your grand president with the memory of all the past grand presidents and brothers of the Native Sons of the Golden West living and deceased who have worked so hard to perpetuate our beloved Order. A special thank you to my wife Justine and my daughter Audra.

I say my family because in the early 1900s, what made my grandfather Mike Brocco leave his home in Sementina, Switzerland and immigrate to the USA, pass through Ellis Island and travel across 3,000 miles of this country to settle in Nicasio, where he worked at the Lafranchi dairy, to which our trucking company still hauls feed products, hauling milk cans and delivering mail by wagon in the area.

This is where he met Marie Bolzari, my grandmother, whose parents came from Italy. My grandfather and grandmother moved to Sonoma and started a dairy and raised chickens. In 1923 my father George was born. In the next three years Henry and David joined the family. The year 1933 saw the passing of their mother and wife. Challenged with raising three mischievous boys he returned to his hometown abroad, married Oliva and brought her back to Sonoma for a small surprise...the three boys.

Father Joins Native Sons, Goes to War

In 1943 my father volunteered for the army—but not before joining Sonoma Parlor #111 of the Native Sons of the Golden West. After returning home from the Pacific Theater of operations in the Philippines, he married a local girl, Mary Hobbs Ward Hayes. My mother knew the hardships of war by losing her husband Moss after the Battle of the Bulge and with a daughter of two years, Darla, my sister, to raise.

My mother's side of the family can be traced back to Mary Todd Lincoln and to the Mayflower. Raised in Tell City, Indiana, by Viola and Herchell Hobbs, who died at an early age, Viola married Harry Ward and in the late 1920s off to California they came to Sonoma. Both sides of my family found hope and inspiration in California. "Go west my son and find the dream you seek" was the motto of my forefathers and the pioneers.

In 1948 George Michael Brocco was born, and in 1954 they were blessed with me! Now what does all this family history have to do with all of this. Well as it was and should be, fathers, uncles, brothers, cousins, and friends brought members into the Native Sons of the Golden West. My father George and Peter Rugeri sponsored my brother Mike and me into the Order as it was for so many of you.

What Happened to That Concept?

But what has happened to that concept? Many have tried that feat, but we get the same story that is common in these days—"I don't have the time" is generally the answer.

Maybe if we tell prospective members of the good times, we all share, doing what we do. You wouldn't be here yourselves if you didn't have any of these fond memories. It saddens me to hear of the loss of brothers who have left the Order because of losing interest, and the politics of these times. I only pray that our lost brothers return, knowing of the good work we have done and the hard work before us.

These times are going to be difficult, but brothers we will move ahead fighting for our pioneer families and the history that made this state what it is today. Good bad or otherwise, the teaching and visual displays are crucial to keep the youth and public informed of the hardships of the early years it took to make this their home of greatness.

If this Order is to survive, we'll all have to resort back to these ways of recruitment if the NSGW is going to grow. Let me tell you, that with all of my drive and love for our Order, I will do my best to represent the Native Sons of the Golden West with all of the resources you make available to me and this core of grand officers. We all must look forward to the future and the betterment of our beloved Order.

The Good Farmers

On to my recognition of the history of California agriculture. My family and so many hard-working farmers live to put food and textiles on the tables of the world. When I was young, my grandpa would every so often identify someone in our community with two words that on their surface were basic; in their depth though, they gave profound meaning to who that person was, a good farmer. To grandpa, a good farmer was not simply a man or woman who could drive a tractor, run cows, work ground, or grow food. A good farmer was a steward of his family, their faith, and their community. Good farmers were those who got up to make pancakes at the monthly community breakfast. Good farmers were those who wouldn't pass a piece of trash on the ground without picking it up. Good farmers went to work for something every day—whatever that might be. They were those who took a strong care for those around them—not complacent, entitled, or selfish.

It is not my goal in life to be behind the wheel of a tractor, eighteen-wheeler or on the other side of a feed bunk, which I love, but it is my goal to be a Good Farmer. I strive for to show up every day as a good farmer, a good student of life, a good friend, a good listener, business owner, community member, father, brother and husband. We have a lot of choices in our world. It's not in all things that you get to choose, but in a lot of things you have a choice. So, choose prospective over closed-mindedness, choose excellence over mediocrity, choose grace over grudges.

Choose to look people in the eye, to hold your shoulders back, to make good on your commitments, to be thoughtful, to rid yourselves of bad habits, to share, to go to church, to ask for help, to show up, to be present, to stand for something. Choose to weave your parachute, find your fire and be on time. And, while you're at it, choose to strive be your own kind of "Good Farmer"; that is what inspired me. Now help me make the Native Sons of the Golden West walk this life with pride.

Thank you to Sonoma parlor #111, all my brothers throughout the state, past grand presidents, and wives without selflessness of advice counseling me about the Native Sons of the Golden West.

One more thought, I heard a George Jones song that says it best, "Who's gonna fill their shoes", who's gonna fill our shoes?