

A Flag Day Carol

Paul R. Palmer

Earth-date: 2010

My best bud Gord called me yesterday evening. Really worked up. Sounded high as a kite on the 4th of July, but it was only the 14th of June.

“Stig! Is that you?”

“Course it’s me! What’s up, Gord? Sounds like you’re freaking out there. Where are you?”

“At home. And I’m definitely freaking out! I got company!”

“Yeah? So?”

“I think I got a ghost here or something!”

“A ghost? Listen up, man! Don’t eat or drink or smoke anything for a while and you’ll be okay.”

“Hey! You know I don’t do stuff like that, Stig! I’m just sitting here reading a book. Suddenly this glowing shape appears right next to me on the couch. Turned into an old guy and I freaked. And I can’t get up or I’d be outa here! It’s like I’m stuck to the couch. Just lucky my phone was here. He’s trying to talk to me!”

I thought I better humor him. “So what does he have to say? Does he speak English?”

“Yeah. Funny-like, but English. Hold on. Says he came from the past. Something about his cousin’s friend’s time machine.”

“Time machine? That pops it, Gord! So does this old man have a name?”

“Wait a sec, Stig. I’ll ask him.”

Funniest thing. I could hear poor Gordo jawing away, but I couldn’t hear anybody answering.

”Yeah, he says his name is Francis Bellamy.”

“Francis Bellamy? Never heard of him.”

“Me neither, Stig. Hold on. He says we mighta heard of his cousin Edward.”

“Edward Bellamy? Nope. So he says he’s from the past?”

“Yeah.”

“When in the past? And where? Ask Frank that.” Again I hear Gord, but nobody else.

“1893, Stig. He says he’s from freaking 1893! Boston, Mass.”

“That would be in the past all right. So who’s this friend of Frank’s cousin Ed?”

“Just a sec. He says somebody from England named Herbert George Wells.”

“Herbert George.... H. G. Wells? The author of *The Time Machine*?”

“I thought that was an old movie.”

“It is that. But this Wells guy wrote the book. Ask Frank if it’s the same dude.”

“Okay. Hold on. He says Wells wrote a story called *The Chronic Cargo Nuts*, but no *Time Machine*, at least not in his time.”

“Yeah, right. Let me go online here, bud.” I powered up my laptop and searched for some dope on H. G. Wells. Sure enough. *The Time Machine* came two years after 1893, and there was

a story listed as *The Chronic Argonauts* in 1884. I got a sudden case of goose pimples. Maybe, just maybe.... “You said Francis Bellamy, Gord? Ask him to spell it.” He asked and spelled it for me. Sure enough, there he was. “Hey, Gord. Ask Frank if he wrote the Pledge of Allegiance.”

“You nuts, Stig? Don’t joke with me!”

“Seriously, bud. Just ask him.”

“Okay.... Hey, you got it right! He says he did, just a year ago!”

A year before 1893. This was getting too weird. “I don’t quite know what to think, Gord, but you may be talking to the real dude. Says here he wrote the Pledge in 1892 all right. Ask Frank to say it for you.”

“Okay, Stig. I’ll ask him. Hold on.”

The next thing I know, there’s a shout and a crash. Then he gets back on, all hysterical.

“Geez, Stig! I ask him to say his Pledge and he gives me this Nazi stiff-arm salute! Sorry. I threw my book at him. Went right through him! Now he’s asking what’s wrong with me. What’s wrong? You old perv! You just gave me a Hitler high-five, that’s what! He says he has no idea what I’m talking about.”

“Well, he wouldn’t now, would he, bud? Hitler came along much later. Hold on. Okay, I just checked it out. They used to give the straight-arm salute to the flag. Until 1942. Then they changed it because of you-know-who.”

“Yeah? Hey, sorry, Frank, I mean Mr. Bellamy. My bud Stig says you’re okay. This Hitler guy took over Germany and caused a huge war and killed millions of people till he got busted. His gang used your salute, so they changed ours to a hand over the heart. Like this. Hey, Stig. Mr. Bellamy says he kind of likes the heart salute better.”

“I’m so glad, Gordo. Ask him again to say the pledge. I can’t hear him talking, so you repeat what he says, okay?”

“Okay. Here goes.”

I was reading along while he repeated the words. I had no idea the Pledge was so different back then, but there was my nutso bud Gord reciting it just as Francis Bellamy wrote it.

“I pledge allegiance to my flag, and to the republic for which it stands: one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

I was speechless.

“That ain’t the pledge, Stig! This guy’s a liar!”

“No he isn’t, Gord. You said it just the way he wrote it. Hang on while I read a little more. Okay, tell Frank that the D.A.R. and the American Legion got together in 1924 and pressured the Flag Board to add the bit about ‘the flag of the United States of America’ to make sure everybody knew which nation they were pledging to.”

“That’s just dumb, man! If you’re looking right at an American flag, what other place can you mean?”

“Agreed, old bud, but that’s what happened. Honest. Just tell Frank that.”

I heard him relay the message while I read more.

“He’s not a happy camper, Stig. He just said something about ‘meddlesome fools’. What’s the D.A.R. anyway?”

“That’s the ‘Daughters of the American Revolution’. You better tell him about the other change the government made to his Pledge back in 1954.”

“You mean the ‘under God’ bit?”

“That’s the one. He’ll like that. Says here he was a Baptist preacher.”

“Okay, I’ll tell him. Holy crap, Stig! He just went ballistic!”

“Ask him what’s wrong with it, Gord.”

“He’s really freaking mad, Stig! Says his Pledge was meant for every citizen of the U.S.A. Not just for monkey fists.”

“What the hey, Gord! Monkey fists?”

“Sorry, man. He’s correcting me. Not monkey fists. Mon-oh-thee-ists. What’s that mean, Stig?”

“Monotheists. That’s people who think there’s just one god, Gordo.”

“Doesn’t everybody?”

“Course not! There’s Hindu folks who believe in lots of gods, and all kinds of other people who don’t believe in any gods: Buddhists, Atheists, Humanists, Secularists, Rationalists. Says here about one out of ten U.S. citizens doesn’t believe in any god at all.”

“Okay, I see. Geez, this Bellamy guy is really mad! He’s hot as a light bulb, yelling about ‘traitors to the ideals of the founders’. Says they got some nerve, using ‘God’ to divide the ‘nation indivisible’. He wants to know what unpatriotic idiots screwed up the Pledge like that. He’s really pissed!”

“I can see why, Gord. Tell him the Knights of Columbus lobbied for the change, and lots of preachers besides. Tell him the President was badgered in church by his own preacher to make the change official, and he knuckled under.”

“Okay, Stig. I told him. Zow! He’s really unhappy now, man. Hold on. He wants to know if anybody’s trying to rescue the Pledge so it can be said in good faith by everybody.”

“Checking it out, Gordo. Okay, got it. There’s a guy named Mike Newdow in California who sued the government in 2000 to restore the Pledge. A court upheld him in 2002 and found the words ‘under God’ unconstitutional. Seems the First Amendment says that Congress can’t pass any laws establishing a national religion. And it guarantees everybody the right to practice their religion freely, which includes the right to be free from having to do things according to other people’s religions.”

“That’s a no-brainer! I’ll tell him. Okay, he’s much happier now. He says he can’t stay any longer. He says to tell you thanks for renewing his faith in America. Hey! He’s fading out! Bye, Mr. Bellamy! He’s gone. Everything’s back to normal. I can move again. I was really shaking there for a while. Thanks, Stig!”

“Yeah, well. He left too soon. That same court just this year decided that the ‘under God’ bit is okay after all. They say it has nothing to do with religion.”

“What?! How do they figure that?”

“Ya got me, Gord! I think Frank was right.”

“Me too, Stig. What kind of country would set up a trick Pledge that everybody can’t say?”

“I dunno, man. But we’re living in it.”

“Bummer.”

“Yeah.”

“So what do we do about it, Stig?”

“Well, Gordo, I don’t know exactly. Tell people. Write letters. Whatever it takes. I’ll think about it.”

“Sounds good. Hey, Stig.”

“Yeah, Gord?”

“Read me that original pledge one more time.”

“For sure. Here goes: ‘*I pledge allegiance to my flag, and to the republic for which it stands: one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*’”

“Radical, man! You know what would be even better?”

“What’s that, bud?”

“If the Pledge said ‘with liberty, *equality* and justice for all.’”

“You’re a freaking genius, Gordo! Says here that Francis Bellamy thought the same. You know why he didn’t put it in the Pledge?”

“Why?”

“He said he left out the ‘equality’ part because he thought the country was still ‘too many thousands of years’ away from true equality.”

“Whoa! Long way to go, man!”

“Long way for sure.”

“You said one out of ten Americans are left behind by the Pledge now? That must be more than a million people.”

“Make that thirty, forty million, bud.”

“Wow! Now I don’t feel so good about saying it just to go along with the crowd.”

“I know. Me neither.”

“Okay. Thanks again, Stig!”

“Any time, Gordo! Think about it and we’ll talk later. Happy Flag Day!”

April 27, 2010

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