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MICHAEL P. COLUMNS

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My Hero, The I Choose Hell Guy

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Everybody should have a hero, and George Kalman is mine.

I know what you're saying. I know, for beginners, that what you are not saying is: "Why couldn't you have chosen Chase Utley, or Barack Obama, or even Joe Dirt, even though he's a fictional movie character brought to life by the guy who is not Chris Farley, as your hero?" I know, as well, that you are not saying: "Why don't you choose as your hero somebody really important, like the inventors of Facebook, which has done more towards the efforts of Americans who want to substitute frivolous time-wasting activities for actual productive tasks than anything since the invention of the personal telephone call from the office?"

No, I know that what you are saying is: "Who in the name of Joe Dirt is George Kalman?" I understand the sentiment behind that question, because up until about four hours ago, I did not know who in the name of Joe Dirt George Kalman was either.

But thanks to Samuel G. Freedman of The New York Times, I do know who George Kalman is, and now he's my hero. But not for the reason you might think.

George Kalman is the East Brandywine man and independent filmmaker who has filed a lawsuit in federal court in Philadelphia to overturn Pennsylvania's blasphemy law. He did so after the state in 2007 turned down his request to name his film production company I Choose Hell Productions L.L.C., a choice meant to emphasize his belief that even if life can be hell at times, it is better than committing suicide.

Yes, I know what you're saying: "Pennsylvania has a law against

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Taken on a recent trip to the Laurel Highlands of western Pennsylvania

ABOUT ME

MICHAEL P. RELAHAN

I started working at the Daily Local News in West Chester, Pa., in 1982, three years after graduating from Earlham College, a Quaker oriented school in Richmond, Ind. In 2004, I was asked to begin writing a column once every other week, focusing on out-of-the-way subjects concerning Chester County, Pa., and more specifically, West Chester. In 2006, I began writing the column every week. In October, 2007, after 25 years on the job, I went back to reporting. I started this site to give my friends and family a chance to see what I've been thinking and writing about.

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blasphemy? Then how did they get the permission to build those awful looking homes in Upper Uwchlan? And don't even get me started on the Coatesville City Council!" Actually, the anti-blasphemy statute it is not a law like those weird codes that outlaw women in Florida from falling asleep under a hair dryer, or ban animals in California from mating within 1,500 feet of a day care center, or restrict locating a sexology shop in West Chester, Pa., within 300 feet of a church. No, this is a statute that maintains that corporations in the Commonwealth cannot have as their names any words that would "constitute blasphemy, profane cursing or swearing or that profane the Lords's name."

Leaving aside for the moment the notion that there is such a thing as "non-profane cursing," we should point out that the state bureaucrats who are in charge of sorting out the blasphememes from the ordinary words in corporate Pennsylvania have not always been as diligent as they were in Kalman's case when they denied his I Choose Hell Productions L.L.C. name. According to the Times article, there exist in the state corporations that use the handle Devil Media and Vomit Noise Productions, so somebody was apparently paying too much attention to his or her "Which Overly Restrictive State Red Tape Functionary Are You?" Facebook Quiz when those applications came across their desks.

But thank (not to drop names) God for providing Kalman with the wherewithal to bring the matter to the attention of the courts, where hopefully someone with the requisite understanding of the Constitution will see that the Pennsylvania's anti-blasphemy statute makes about as much sense as not being able to play professional baseball in Philadelphia on Sundays (law repealed in 1933) or being forbidden from buying a bottle of "Two Buck Chuck" wine at the nearest Trader Joe's any day of the year (law still on the books.)

But even though I think his mind is in the right place, his legal challenge to the law is not the reason why Kalman is my hero. No, he is my hero because of what he told Mr. Freedman of the Times.

"When you read the First Amendment, this is something you can be proud of," he is quoted as saying. "If you care about the human condition, then you care about the First Amendment."

I think even Joe Dirt would agree.

POSTED BY MICHAEL P. RELAHAN AT 8:36 AM 

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