

And Away We Go...

By Senior Steward, Michael Souza

One of Freemasonry's most famous members was comedic actor and musician, Jackie Gleason. Gleason (February 26, 1916 – June 24, 1987) was a multi-talented performer who was both an acclaimed actor as well as a very competent jazz musician. Though he made hundreds of appearances in movies and television and had over fifty jazz albums, he was probably most well-known for starring as the cranky bus driver Ralph Kramden in the 1950s television series 'The Honeymooners'. Gleason's alter-ego Ralph Kramden had several catch phrases such as "And away we go...", and, when he was angry with his wife, "To the moon, Alice! To the moon!"

Though Ralph Kramden was a bumbling, short-fused, blue-collar bus driver, the real Jackie Gleason was the complete opposite. He had a photographic memory and only needed to read a script once to know his lines. And though he could not read music, he understood music composition enough that he could conduct a full orchestra. He was also a kind and generous man who was remembered fondly after his death by all of those who worked with him. As I mentioned before, Jackie Gleason was a Mason (as was his Honeymooners co-star Art Carney, who played goofy neighbor Ed Norton). As the 1950s was the heyday of American Freemasonry, Gleason and Carney decided to incorporate a fictitious fraternal lodge within the structure of the TV show, having both Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton belonging to the IOFSR, or International Order of Friendly Sons of the Raccoons.



Jackie Gleason was a very accomplished entertainer, but he was a very interesting person as well. Gleason strongly believed that the Earth was being visited by aliens from another planet. In fact, Jackie Gleason was one of the first UFO researchers and had the largest library of UFO and paranormal related books in the world.

His second wife, Beverly, said that he was a voracious reader and that his UFO related book collection alone was well over a thousand books. He had original and out of print books that were literally the only ones of their kind, and early UFO researchers would ask to have access to his library. Gleason's fixation with UFOs was so strong that he actually built a house in the shape of a UFO. This house, which he affectionately called "The Mothership" was located in Peekskill, New York and

was built circular, intending to look like a giant flying saucer (the house is still there, though owned by new residents).

One of the most interesting stories connected with Jackie Gleason involved dead alien bodies and Richard Nixon! Jackie Gleason was a staunch Republican and an avid golfer who often golfed with his good friend (and President of the United States) Richard M. Nixon. Not many people know, but Richard Nixon had a keen interest in UFOs as well, and he and Gleason, during one particular golf outing in Florida in 1974, started discussing UFOs. Gleason asked Nixon if he, in the capacity of President, had seen or received any information about alien contact, but Nixon kept his cards close to his vest and did not give Gleason a direct answer.

As the story goes, later that night a car pulled up to Gleason's Florida home. According to Gleason's ex-wife Beverley, two secret service agents got out of the car, rang the doorbell, and asked Gleason to go with them. Beverly said that she was worried and couldn't understand why the secret service would want to take her husband away at nearly midnight. Later, when Gleason returned, she stated that he was shaking and nearly hyperventilating. She said he kept repeating, "It's true, it's all true." When he finally calmed down he told her an incredible story.

According to her (and others family members as well), that night Gleason was taken by the secret service agents to a car with blackened out windows and got in only to find President Nixon in the back seat with him. Nixon said "I want to show you something," and they drove in silence to Homestead Air Force Base not far from Gleason's Florida home.

The following is from Jackie Gleason himself: "We drove to the very far end of the base in a segregated area, finally stopping near a well-guarded building. The security police saw us coming and just sort of moved back as we passed them and entered the structure. There were a number of labs we passed through first before we entered a section where Nixon pointed out what he said was the wreckage from a flying saucer, enclosed in several large cases. Next, we went into an inner chamber and there were six or eight of what looked like glass-topped Coke freezers. Inside them were the mangled remains of what I took to be children. Then - upon closer examination - I saw that some of the other figures looked quite old. Most of them were terribly mangled as if they had been in an accident. They were beings not of this Earth."



Beverly Gleason later said that Jackie was in a state of shock for about a week. He could not sleep, and drank even more than usual (which must have been a lot since he was a notoriously heavy drinker).

According to Beverly, he never went back on his insistence that he saw alien bodies and, confirmed by other family members, insisted that the incident happened right up until his death on June 24, 1987.

What is one to make of all this, my Brothers? As Masons we are reminded that "Numberless worlds are around us..." and you know the rest. Maybe you will think a little differently the next time you watch an episode of *The Honeymooners* and hear Ralph Kramden say, "To the moon, Alice! To the moon!"