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First Friday News & Views

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BEYOND THE UPS AND DOWNS

by Jonathan Wilson

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CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, August 7, 2009 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

There is no meeting for July.

▼ R.S.V.P. by Friday July 31 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

The headlines proclaim that the US Supreme Court refuses to consider a challenge to the infamous, national security compromising “don’t-ask-don’t-tell” policy of the Pentagon that Obama has been slow to change. The headlines herald that Vermont joins Iowa and four other states in the march toward full recognition of same-gender marriage. The headlines report the decision of the California Supreme Court leaving in place a state constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, followed immediately by the announcement that the lawyers from both sides of the *Bush v. Gore* case have joined forces to appeal the California decision to the federal courts. Back and forth, and the respective sides feel alternately depressed and euphoric over and over again.

I’m reminded of a parable. Once upon a time there was a colony of water bugs living on the surface of the Atlantic Ocean just off the east coast of Florida. They were riding the waves up and down, debating endlessly the question, “Where are we going? Are we going up some more, or has the wave peaked and we’re about to head down again? Are we going down some more, or have we hit the valley of the wave and we’re about to go back up?” An occasional storm would come along to whip up the waves, prompting the bugs to debate vigorously. “Going up? Going down? Up? Down?” The water bug newspaper sold more papers to report each new development in the debate. Headlines screamed with each one. It was exhausting, especially with the constant need to attend to important things like gathering food, procreating, staying afloat, and ducking the real dangers of water bug predators.

Through it all the majority of those water bugs remained relatively oblivious to the Gulf Stream. The moral of the story: where the colony was actually going was England, whatever the daily ups and downs.

Until early in the 1900s, it was believed (erroneously) that all of God’s children straight and same-gender intimacy was merely straight folks acting naughty, even abominably. By the time I was born, same-gender *orientation* had been recognized by the professional psychiatric community, but until I was twenty-seven years old, married to a woman, and already the father of one child, homosexuality was still considered a mental illness. Gay people were routinely treated as sick, treated even with electric shock to “cure” them. From deep in the closet I was nurturing my homophobia, not unlike those today who claim that homosexuality is just a behavioral choice that they have declined to make (except on the down low). Had I disclosed my same-gender attractions at an earlier age, I could have expected my loving parents to get me in for professional treatment and, potentially, institutionalization. Until just six years ago there were still laws on the books in several states criminalizing homosexual acts. The US Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional the last of those in *Lawrence v. Texas*.

Just in my adult lifetime, we have gone from mental illness and criminality to the point that now *homophobia* is the mental illness, same-gender intimacy is legal in

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every state in the country; the civil rights of gay people enjoy legal protection in nearly half of the states; six states have legalized same-gender marriage; and others, along with the nation's capital, have legally recognized those and/or adopted civil unions for same-gender couples. Successive US Presidents have appointed openly gay US ambassadors to other nations. Multiple members of Congress are or have been openly gay. Not a one has been defeated for re-election after coming out. You can't swing a dead cat in Washington DC without hitting a gay Congressional staffer. Iowa has an openly gay and re-elected state senator.

Anyone familiar, therefore, with recent historical events, knows full-well where we are going. We are going to put the Gay and Lesbian Task Force and other, similar organizations -- perhaps even our breakfast club -- out of business. That will be a great day and it's already on the horizon for those with their eyes open and focused on the future.

It's been said that those afraid of water don't get really agitated until they find themselves in the path of a rising tide. Then they get animated indeed, but to no avail. I like to think that the crescendo coming from our detractors is tacit acknowledgment of a rising, irrepressible tide in favor of equality for members of the GLBT community. It's true that the arc of history bends toward justice, and I think one of those arcs is going to be a rainbow.

Featured Speakers in June:

Mike Gronstal and Pat Murphy

Our guest speakers at the Scholarship Awards meeting on June 5 were the two leaders of the Iowa Legislature, Senate Majority Leader Michael E. Gronstal, who represents District 50 (Council Bluffs and Carter Lake) in the Iowa Senate and House Speaker Patrick J. Murphy, who represents District 28 (Dubuque) in the Iowa House of Representatives. The two Democrats were greeted with a standing ovation when they were

introduced, in heartfelt thanks for their passionate and persuasive leadership of the General Assembly on fairness in GLBT issues.

Most especially, FFBC members are grateful for the powerful and positive statement which the two leaders issued immediately upon the announcement (April 3) of the Supreme Court's unanimous decision affirming marriage equality in the State:

Iowa continues to be a leader in guaranteeing civil rights

"Thanks to today's decision, Iowa continues to be a leader in guaranteeing all of our citizens' equal rights. The court has ruled today that when two Iowans promise to share their lives together, state law will respect that commitment, regardless of whether the couple is gay or straight.

"When all is said and done, we believe the only lasting question about today's events will be why it took us so long. It is a tough question to answer because treating everyone fairly is really a matter of Iowa common sense and Iowa common decency.

"Today, the Iowa Supreme Court has reaffirmed those Iowa values by ruling that gay and lesbian Iowans have all the same rights and responsibilities of citizenship as any other Iowan.

"Iowa has always been a leader in the area of civil rights.

"In 1839, the Iowa Supreme Court rejected slavery in a decision that found that a slave named Ralph became free when he stepped on Iowa soil, 26 years before the end of the Civil War decided the issue.

"In 1868, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled that racially segregated "separate but equal" schools had no place in Iowa, 85 years before the U.S. Supreme Court reached the same decision.

"In 1873, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled against racial discrimination in public accommodations, 91 years before the U.S. Supreme Court reached the same decision.

"In 1869, Iowa became the first state in the union to admit women to the practice of law.

"In the case of recognizing loving relationships between two adults, the Iowa Supreme Court is once again taking a leadership position on civil rights.

"Today, we congratulate the thousands of Iowans who now can express their love for each other and have it recognized by our laws."

Sen. Gronstal (who had been our speaker last March) and Rep. Murphy each spoke of how he had arrived at his own personal commitment to fairness for all Iowans regardless of classification, and of how the mar-

*As I have matured, my faith in God has increased,
and my faith in religion has diminished.*

Up

Review by
Gary Kaufman

Up, the delightful, new animated film by Pixar and Disney, opens with Movietone newsreel footage called “Spotlight on Adventure.” The newsreel features the exploits of Charles Muntz, a discoverer of strange creatures from far away lands. He travels to these lands via his enormous dirigible, “The Spirit of Adventure”. “Adventure is out there!” proclaims Charles Muntz, and a young Carl Frederickson dreams of being such an adventurer and making it to Paradise Falls in South America which Muntz describes as, “A land lost in time!”

Carl soon discovers Ellie, a girl who shares this love of adventure, and they form an adventure club and promise each other that someday they will go to Paradise Falls. Then in a four-minute bit of brilliant animation and story telling, the film shows the entirety of Carl’s life with Ellie, from marrying Ellie, to sharing their life together, to saving together to go to Paradise Falls. But life intervenes, and the couple never makes it to Paradise Falls. One of the joys of **Up** is that it is an animated film that takes its time to let the emotions build. It is very adult in this respect, so that by the end of this four-minute segment you feel emotionally Carl’s loss and loneliness after Ellie dies.

After her death, Carl is living in his Elizabethan home, a grumpy old man, all alone in the middle of a high-rise building zone. His is the only home left. He refuses to sell, but when Carl’s temper gets the best of him, the city threatens to take away his home and send Carl to Shady Oaks, a retirement home. Carl decides to escape, ties hundreds of helium-filled balloons to his home, and Carl, house and all, takes off for South America in search of Paradise Falls. There is only one problem--stuck on the porch is Russell, an eight-year-old Wilderness Explorer who had been pestering Carl to let Russell help him so Russell could earn his “assisting the elderly” badge and finally advance to being a Senior Wilderness Explorer. It was the only badge Russell had left to earn. Begrudgingly, Carl eventually lets Russell inside the house, and they share the adventure together.

Edward Asner, the voice of Carl, makes a wonderful grumpy old man with a heart of gold, just as he did

when he played Lou Grant on the **Mary Tyler Moore Show**. His interaction with the eight-year-old Russell is delightful. But the one thing that really makes this film stand out is the emotions that the viewer feels while watching the movie. It is a film that takes time to build these feelings, which is exceedingly rare for an animated movie where they expect you to laugh one minute and cry the next. Pixar makes it happen.

Go see the movie **Up**. It is a total joy. The movie is available in 3-D and regular 2-D animation, and for the first time I did not find the 3-D animation annoying as the 3-D seemed to add to the dimension of this adventure story. The film is a delight in either version.

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riage issue in particular has no relation whatever to religious beliefs or practices. They noted again that the Court’s decision speaks directly to that fact and imposes nothing on any church in the state. In response to a question about possible backlash from Republican legislators in coming Sessions, Murphy said that we’d all have to continue to be vigilant, but that as long as Democrats remain in control and continue to get elected—some of them indeed from highly conservative districts—it is not very likely that the Court’s decision can be thwarted.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

No July meeting is planned because of the Fourth of July weekend. Thanks to Allen Vander Linden and Mike Thompson for hosting the June 20 picnic at their home in Urbandale.



Thanks to the following individuals for helping man the FFBC tent at the Gay Pride event on June 14: Chris Knudson, Aaron Todd, Brian Douglas, Rick Davis, Jeff Li, Scott Johnson, and Michael Thompson.



Thanks to Brad Clark for his introduction of our June speakers, Iowa Senate Majority Leader Mike Gronstal and Speaker of the Iowa House of Representatives Pat Murphy.



Articles for the August newsletter need to be submitted by July 13 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or to Steve Person at sorlanp@yahoo.com.



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Des Moines, Iowa*

JULY 2009

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From the Editor

Zen and Motorcycle Maintenance

As I have grown older, many things that used to bother me no longer seem so important, like Anderson Erickson Dairy's decision to quit making hand-packed cottage cheese. It seems that Zen—the belief that enlightenment can be attained through meditation, self-contemplation, and intuition rather than through faith and devotion—has increasingly had its influence on me. That doesn't mean, however, that certain situations still don't bug me.

Take for instance those obnoxious anti-abortion billboards that are scattered throughout the city and along major highways. I understand that the anti-abortion groups have the right to express their opinions, but I believe they do not have the right to peddle misleading information. I firmly assert that life begins at birth and anything before that simply has the potential for life. This debate can only be put to rest by life insurance companies. I know of no life insurer that will write a life insurance policy for an individual who does not have a birth date. If such a life insurance company exists, I hope someone will enlighten me so I can put this public irritation behind me and place it in the realm of Zen.

Likewise, I become very bothered when a Pentecostal group is allowed to conduct a monthly church service in the rotunda of the Iowa Capitol. They gather there on the fourth Monday of each month and sing hymns, deliver sermons, and generally make their presence as obnoxious as possible. Who allows these people to do this? I wonder how they would like it if I were to attend one of their meetings at their regular church and give a tour of the Capitol while they are carrying on in their house of worship. Turnabout is fair play it seems to me. Also, the religious "Christian" zealots gather at the Capitol annually for the National Day of Prayer. If it's so national why aren't there any Jews or Muslims or Hindus in attendance? And what would these so-called "Christians" do if these groups were represented? Whatever happened to the concept of Separation of Church and State? It obviously doesn't exist in the Iowa Capitol! Perhaps the presence of a group of Zen Buddhists at the next National Day of Prayer will put the issue to rest.

Just as bothersome as those mentioned above are motorcyclists—at least those motorcyclists who believe that the louder the machine the "cooler" it makes its handler. WRONG! I know the City of Des Moines has a noise ordinance, and that ordinance is completely ignored by the police. Why don't they issue tickets to those idiots who rev their motorcycle engines? If a person is anywhere in the vicinity where these boorish people parade themselves, all conversation has to stop until the cacophony subsides. The noise generated by these unnecessarily loud machines can carry on for many city blocks. A little motorcycle maintenance or a stiff state tax on motorcycles could alleviate the problem and deliver it into the hands of contemplation.

Thank God for Zen! May it be my goal to achieve it totally.

Steve Person

My spouse sat down on the couch next to me as I was flipping channels and said, "What's on TV?" I said, "Dust." And that's when the fight started. . .