



THE
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
OF THE
FIRST FRIDAY
BREAKFAST CLUB, INC.

First Friday News & Views

DECEMBER
2011
VOLUME
16
ISSUE
12

PAYING IT BACK BY PAYING IT FORWARD

by Jonathan Wilson

Who among us who are unapologetically “out” and justifiably proud did it all by ourselves and without help directly from others, particularly others who came out before us? You? I’d bet not. I’d venture to guess that almost no one to this day has managed to come out without the direct encouragement, support, and guidance of one or more others who have traveled that scary road before us. Stop reading for a moment and think about those who lent you a sympathetic ear and a helping hand.

As society’s attitudes have changed, coming out has doubtless become easier and it, on average, happens at a younger and younger age. But the undeniable fact that it has become easier is irrefutable proof that everyone has benefitted from those who have gone before. In short, every person who is “out” has benefitted directly or indirectly from those who have gone before. Often those who have gone before did it with no high minded purpose and, rather, just to survive. But just by surviving, in a much more hostile world, those who have gone before ran interference for us.

We owe them. We are indebted to them, immeasurably. Those historically, who have been martyred for the cause, are owed perhaps the most. We know the names of some of those martyrs who lived, suffered, and died, and who did not know our names.

When I was still in the coming out process, I attended a play in San Francisco called, as I recall, **Harvey Milk**. Don’t hold me to that title, but it was a one man production about the iconic Harvey Milk. It had to have been in the late 80s or early 90s. In it, at one point, Harvey Milk is responding to a question about why he was working so tirelessly and selflessly for the cause of GLBT civil equality. He said – get this – “I’m doing it so that someday some guy in Des Moines, Iowa, can feel safe to come out of the closet and live an authentic life,” or words to that effect. But he said, “. . . some guy in Des Moines, Iowa.” Needless to say, it touched me. I won’t forget it as long as I live.

There’s no way that I can thank Harvey Milk directly. He’s long dead, shot by an assassin. But let me share another story.

I served for many years on the Des Moines School Board. In January 1995, the school district, thanks to the impending Iowa Republican caucuses, became embroiled in controversy over a proposal to implement a long-standing policy of non-discrimination based on sexual orientation. There was a special school board meeting on January 24, 1995—televised state-wide—on the topic of homosexuality and the public schools. That night, at 10:24 p.m., I came out publicly as a gay man.

The next day, and for several days to follow, two secretaries and I spent nearly all of our time fielding supportive calls from all over the state. One call I took was from a woman in out-state Iowa. She said, “Mr. Wilson, you don’t know me, but my husband and I have a gay son. Last night we watched the school board meeting on television together and, because of what you said and did, my husband and I don’t think our son is going to kill himself. I just had to call and thank you for keeping my precious boy alive.” Thank you Harvey Milk.

After being defeated in a bid for re-election to the Des Moines School Board, I helped found the First Friday Breakfast Club, an association of gay and bisexual men and the largest independ-

INSIDE

- Developing Dialogue with Our Detractors by Jonathan Wilson 2
- The Thing.** Review by Gary Kaufman 3
- Briefs & Shorts 3
- Being an Out Gay Man in Steve King Country by Michael Thompson 4
- Twenty Men Share Stories about Coming Out Review by Bruce McCabe 5
- Colon Cancer Forum Announcement 5
- My M.O. by Steve Per-son 6

CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, December 2, 2011, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by November 30 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

(Continued from page 1)

ent breakfast club in the state of Iowa. We meet on the first Friday of every month – thus the name. We have fascinating speakers who educate us on a wide range of topics, and we educate them with more positive images of gay men. Some members come for that interaction. Some come for the breakfast (and from them I get occasional feedback if the menu changes or the coffee's cold). Some come for the opportunity to network or to make and nurture friendships – or even to find a husband, which has happened.

At virtually every meeting there will be one or more who are still in the coming out process. They are there to discover what it's like to walk into a room full of men in broad daylight and with no alcohol around and have folks assume that they're gay. The regulars who are there, whether they realize it or not, are bit players in the life of each such novice. Simply by warming a seat and greeting strangers warmly, they are fulfilling a mission. They are paying back those who have gone before by paying it forward.

We require little from those who choose to participate in the breakfast club. They needn't lift a finger other than to turn off the alarm and, once a month, roll their butts out of bed and show up for a good breakfast and a great speaker. In the process, they serve a higher purpose, perhaps without even knowing it – until they read this article. There aren't a lot of ways to thank those who have gone before us; the First Friday Breakfast Club offers one of them.

Oh, and that woman who called me from out-state Iowa; the woman who, on that day, was willing to settle for just keeping her precious boy alive – what do you suppose she is going to do down the road when someone trashes her gay son, or trashes gay people, or speaks out in support of anti-gay initiatives like a constitutional amendment or whatever? Three things can be said: politicians beware, mother bears are notorious, and Katie bar the door. And it gets easier still. Mark my words, we win.

Developing Dialogue With Our Detractors

by Jonathan Wilson

The breakfast club speaker in November was former Iowa state senator Jeff Angelo, a Republican, and founder of Republicans for Freedom. The name of that initiative should not come across as an oxymoron, but it is, given the fact that he is seeking through it to open conversations among Republicans in support of same-gender marriage equality. The current, polarized, political environment largely precludes such conversations on any substantive basis. Senator Angelo has Republican bona fides that give him access to fellow Republicans in venues normally inaccessible to vocal supporters of civil equality for gay children of God. His mere presence, after having been identified with this initiative, has tended to moderate our detractors there and given our "closeted" supporters permission to express their support.

Showing the bravery of David entering the proverbial lions' den, Senator Angelo reported some progress. He also acknowledged, however, that the issue remains highly controversial, politically charged, and still capable of motivating voters and raising money for the Republican Party and its candidates. He attempted to reassure us that context is everything in public discourse. Words from a union member will be pro-union. Words from a corporate type will be pro-corporation and pro-business. Words from a politician – any politician, whether Republican or Democrat – will be intended to achieve a perceived political advantage. The Republicans for Freedom initiative is intended to change the perception that gay-bashing provides, on balance, any political advantage. He is hopeful that the historic association of the Republican Party with matters of individual liberty and freedom from government intrusion will continue to move those in that party toward greater tolerance for equal treatment.



A picture of a section of Tony Hansen's 2011 winter village display. Find him on Facebook to see more or for more information. Happy Holidays!



November speaker, Senator Jeff Angelo

2

There's less and less future in growing older, and carpe diem becomes easier and easier to justify.

The Thing

Review By Gary Kaufman

John Carpenter's **The Thing** is one of the top 5 horror films of all time. So it was with trepidation that I attended the current remake of the tale. When I left the theater in 1981 upon first seeing the Carpenter version, I felt extremely paranoid about everybody around me. The "Thing" could kill you in an instant and then perfectly replicate your body over time so there would be two "Things" out there, ready to strike. No two people could be left alone together, because that's when the "Thing" could strike. The film captured the isolation one would feel in a camp in the Antarctic—the horror of having to face this when you knew no one could help you. The movie had a brilliantly ambiguous ending as it showed the two remaining heroes lying on the cold ground, about to freeze to death and not knowing whether the other one was really the "Thing."



In deference to the Carpenter version, this reincarnation deals with the "Thing" when it was discovered by the Norwegian camp, so it is a prequel to the Carpenter version. In fact, the film ends, if you sit through the final credits, with the replicated Carpenter version opening shots; a wild man trying to kill a dog from a helicopter in the Antarctic. In the area of special effects, such as when the "Thing" reveals himself and is about to attack, this film is every bit as good as the Carpenter version. It lacks some of the emotional appeal, however. In the Carpenter version the audience worries about whether likeable grandpa-esque A. Wilford Brimley is a "Thing" or not, and whether totally unlikable characters, such as the commanding jerk of the camp, Garry, perhaps is not a "Thing," but you want to torch him anyway!

The current version also lacks some of the drama of the Carpenter tale. For example, in this version the test of whether or not a person is a "Thing" is to look in his mouth and see if the person has any fillings. Apparently the "Thing" can't replicate anything inorganic when it seeks to reproduce a living creature that it has killed. So, if someone has no fillings, that person could actually be the "Thing" in disguise or, perhaps, the person is merely someone with good teeth! Compare that to the Carpenter version where people were tied to chairs; electrodes were put into a dish of their blood and, if it squealed in pain, they were "Things" and had to be torched and killed immediately. Which, do you think, is the more intense experience?!

There are some new twists to the story in the current iteration. Instead of the hero being another Kurt Russell, it is a heroine scientist (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) who first figures out that the "Thing" is amongst them and that no one should be allowed to leave. The movie still is intense. It is still an excellent horror film, especially for those who have not seen the Carpenter version. For those who have seen the original, alas, this prequel is pale in comparison to that masterpiece.



Double redundancy: spending time in prison . . . in West Virginia. Billie Holiday

Do Lipton Tea employees take coffee breaks?

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the December 2 meeting no later than November 30. E-mail JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Reverend Dr. Welton Gaddy, National Director of the Interfaith Alliance.

Thanks to John Brentnall for his introduction at the November meeting of former state senator, Jeff Angelo.

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome. Thanks to Fred Mount and Barry McGriff for coordinating the book exchange .

Mark your calendar for the next Red Party event. It will be February 3. Details to follow.

According to James Culbert, the Food Bank of Central Iowa received 151 pounds of food from our members who attended the November meeting. Thanks to all who contributed!

Outside of a dog, a book is probably a man's best friend. Inside of a dog it would be too dark to read. Gracho Marks

Being an Out Gay Man in Steve King Country

by Michael Thompson

My husband, Allen, answered the phone. The caller said they wanted me to be the keynote speaker for the 25th anniversary of the Clarinda Foundation. I was annoyed. “Damn it,” I grumbled, “I left that town in 2003. They can get someone who still lives there for their program!” Yes, I had been a founding member and Foundation president for 16 years, but I had since moved on, and they could too.

What was behind my negative feelings? Clarinda was the southwest Iowa town in which I had lived for 24 years as a family man, bank executive, and community leader. “Closeted gay man” was not on my resume. People in small towns can be gossipy and ultra conservative. Keep in mind this is Steve King country. How would I, a gay man, married to a man, be received? Probably there would be an “Iowa nice” welcome for us at best. Most of the people who would attend probably had not ever known that they knew a gay person, let alone a same-sex married couple.

We had symphony tickets the same night as the Clarinda event, so I was able to give my regrets, which were politely accepted. I had dodged the bullet. “You really should have agreed to keynote this event,” Allen admonished. “The people there sincerely care for you.” “Yeah, right,” I said. A few days later the Foundation’s executive director phoned again. “We want Michael Thompson for our keynote speaker and we’re willing to move the event to a time that works for you,” he implored. I reluctantly agreed to speak, knowing this was way out of my comfort zone, but it was the right thing to do.

I had relocated from southwest Iowa to Des Moines eight years ago with the corporate staff of Bank Iowa. The move made it possible for me to meet other gay men. My first experience of being out in a safe environment was at a First Friday Breakfast Club meeting, and it proved to be a real confidence builder.

Allen and I met at Plymouth Church just a month after I arrived in Des Moines. Our first date became the proverbial one night stand that went bad. We bought a home together in 2004 and life transitioned from being pretty good to being pretty fantastic, once I could align my lifestyle with my gay inner core. I was out to my family and new friends in Des Moines, but not to my coworkers and not to most folks in Clarinda.

In 2009 our marriage brought an end to any semblance of a closeted life. A photo of me hugging a recently married guy while waiting in line to get our own marriage license appeared on the front page of the **Des Moines Register**. Des Moines television stations also interviewed Allen and me for the 6 o’clock news. I know there was conversation buzzing in Clarinda that day.

We drove to the event in Clarinda on a sunny Saturday afternoon, somewhat apprehensive, but more curious about how the evening would unfold. As we entered the Clarinda Country Club parking lot, I was surprised by how full it was. We stepped into a raucous, congested room where the pre-dinner cocktail hour was in progress, and where I would greet many old friends and acquaintances.

I don’t remember much about the dinner, but when it was my turn to speak, I was hoping I would remember my Toastmasters techniques and also to smile a lot. I began with a brief personal history of my past eight years: what my sons who had grown up there were doing now, my divorce from Kathryn in 2002 (and that we were friends), that I had re-married in 2009, and that my spouse, Allen, was here with me tonight.

I reviewed a few accomplishments during my tenure as president which included raising \$2 million for a new city library and \$2 million for a community recreation facility. The latter project allowed me my 15 minutes of fame when former Tonight Show host Johnny Carson personally phoned me and offered his contribution of \$150,000 to complete our fund drive.

For me the evening was magic! I felt once again a part of the community that I had mentally obscured for 8 years. At the conclusion, many came up to me and Allen, thanking me for coming back and for my honesty about my life. Gov. Branstad’s new Economic Development Authority chair and long time director of the Clarinda Foundation warmly greeted me as a friend. Even folks from the anti-gay Missouri Synod church welcomed me with open arms. Local Bank Iowa officers stayed to talk with me at length.

I realized (and should have known) that these people liked me before they knew I am gay and they remain friends today. I know not everyone welcomed me that night. I can hope that some were forced to re-examine the veracity of their anti-gay beliefs. Others may be stuck in their past ideology. If so, I can’t help them to accept me. But the majority of those who welcomed us perhaps took away a new understanding of what a gay man and his same sex spouse are like—much like they are, only gay. The others got to witness the support we were being shown.

The evening exemplifies comments by recent FFBC speaker, former state senator Jeff DeAngelo, when he said that the big difference in acceptance comes with people knowing gay people. For eight years I had resisted going back to Clarinda, assuming I would be unwelcome. But that night in Clarinda, daring to move out of my comfort zone, showed me I was wrong. I can go back to my former home as an out gay man—even in Steve King country.

Some cause happiness wherever they go. Others whenever they go.

Don't corner something that you know is meaner than you.

The early bird may get the worm; the second mouse gets the cheese.

FFBC-Sponsored Forum Coming Soon

Community-Based Cancer Prevention Partnership addresses Disparities in Colorectal Cancer Burden in Iowa

A partnership between the Iowa Cancer Consortium (ICC), the Iowa Research Network, and the University of Iowa has resulted in the establishment of an Iowa Community-Based Cancer Prevention Project. The three-year project is focused on understanding and addressing the disparities in the burden of colorectal cancer in individual Iowa communities.

Daniel Hoffman-Zinnel is the Project Community Assistant for Region - 3 Central Iowa. Project Community Assistants collaborate with community members and health care representatives to focus on colorectal cancer health disparities in local communities.

Community forums are held to give citizens opportunities to discuss and provide feedback on issues relating to colorectal cancer in their communities. The infrastructure and partnerships developed through the project will eventually be applied to community-based research addressing other cancers and lifestyle issues relating to cancer burden, such as tobacco cessation, obesity, lack of physical activity, and dietary habits.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of death among all cancers. Iowa is fourth in the nation when it comes to colorectal cancer. LGBT individuals face many health disparities, including low rates of health insurance, fear of discrimination, negative experience with a health care provider, higher rates of tobacco use, higher rates of substance abuse, higher rates of obesity, and many others. In addition, there is not enough data to extensively show the LGBT population present in many studies, which is also another health disparity.

It's contemplated that a forum will be organized with the endorsement of the First Friday Breakfast Club. In this forum, Daniel will address things specific to gay men, including barriers to screening, perception of the screenings that are available, knowledge of colorectal cancer, etc. The first part of the forum will include education on colorectal cancer, data in Iowa, and screenings that are available. After the education portion, there will be a dialogue on things more specific to gay men in Iowa.

January 17, 2012

6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Mercy Medical Center -- Des Moines, East Tower
Mercy Conference Center
Conference Room 2
1111 Sixth Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50314

Refreshments will be provided by the Mercy Cancer Center and \$25 Casey's Gift Cards will be available to a limited number of participants.

More information about the Iowa Cancer Consortium, the Iowa Research Network, and the University of Iowa can be found at the following websites:

www.CancerIowa.org
www.uihealthcare.com/depts/med/familymedicine/research/irene/index.html
www.uiowa.edu

RSVP by calling Jonathan Wilson (515-288-2500) or by email (jonathanwilson@davisbrownlaw.com)

Twenty Men Share Stories of Coming Out

Book Review by Bruce McCabe

"I contemplated suicide again..." states one of the gay men, Wade, whose coming out story is included in **Journey Out**, by Gene Probasco. The story progresses as he relates *"I wanted to see what a gay bar was all about..."* and continues with, *"I became excited when I saw him ... we connected that night as my first time with another man."*

"I always liked boys as far back as I can remember, probably four or five years of age..." begins Roger's chronicle, and he explains, *"I didn't know I was gay because I didn't know my attraction to other boys had a name."*

Another of the men, Raul, tells how he *"came from a Christian background"* and struggled with the conflict of what the church taught him about sin versus his desires for other men. He admits that the confusion and stress led to more drinking in an attempt to deal with the struggle of being lonely. *"I finally resolved [sic] myself to the fact that I probably was bi-sexual ... but the label bothered me because those in the gay community say you have to be either/or."*

This book illustrates, among other things, how human beings, who happen to be gay, can become almost crazily creative at masquerading on the outside to camouflage who they are on the inside, and the horrible damage that causes. This book is affirming for gay men by giving examples of how coming out can bestow peace and acceptance. The book is also instructional for straight allies.

The stories in Gene Probasco's book are true, and the authenticity makes it a must read for gay men and gay-supportive friends.

JOURNEY OUT: MEMOIRS OF MEN COMING TO GRIPS WITH THEIR ORIENTATION

Author: Gene Probasco 321 pages Available by calling 888-795-4274 ext. 7879 or order online or from your local bookstore.

A bus is a vehicle that runs twice as fast when you're after it as when you're in it.

To be sure of hitting the target, shoot first and call whatever you hit the target.

FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views
Des Moines, Iowa*

DECEMBER 2011

First ▼ Friday
Breakfast Club

Board of
Directors

▼ DIRECTORS ▼

▼ CHRIS CORREY
BRAD HOLLAND
BYRON HUFF
SCOTT KLINEFELTER
RICK MILLER
GARY MOORE
MIKE SMITH
DAVID TEACHOUT
MICHAEL THOMPSON
JOHN TOMPKINS
ALLEN VANDER LINDEN
RYAN WEIDNER
JONATHAN WILSON

OFFICERS ▼

DAVID TEACHOUT
Treasurer

BYRON HUFF
Vice President

JONATHAN WILSON
Secretary & President

Newsletter:

STEVEN PERSON, *Editor*

TONY HANSEN, *Production Editor*

ARTHUR BRUER, *Webmaster*

Website: www.ffbc-iowa.org

PUBLISHER, FFBC BOARD OF DIRECTORS
©2011 FIRST FRIDAY BREAKFAST CLUB, INC.

My M.O. (Monthly Observations)

To the Winners Go the Interpretations

By Steve Person

One of the great annual events that we have in Central Iowa is the Planned Parenthood Book Sale, held every autumn at the state fairgrounds. I attended the sale on its second day and found some good bargains. I picked up a number of books on CDs to listen to in my car, the gem of them being Lady Antonia Fraser's biography of **Marie Antoinette**, brand new and never unwrapped.

In book form, I picked up Pulitzer Prize author Stacy Schiff's new biography, **Cleopatra: A Life**. What a fantastic book that is! As Schiff points out early on, "Among the most famous women to have lived, Cleopatra VII ruled Egypt for twenty-two years. She lost a kingdom once, regained it, nearly lost it again, amassed an empire, lost it all. A goddess as a child, a queen at eighteen, a celebrity thereafter, she was the object of speculation and veneration, gossip and legend, even in her own time.... In one of the busiest afterlives in history she has gone on to become an asteroid, a video game, a cliché, a cigarette, a slot machine, a strip club, a synonym for Elizabeth Taylor. Shakespeare attested to Cleopatra's infinite variety. He had no idea."

Taking on the biography of someone who lived over 2,000 years ago is a monumental task, especially when the main sources wrote about the Egyptian queen nearly a hundred years after her death. As Schiff explains, "Cleopatra's story differs from most women's stories in that the men who shaped it—for their own reasons—enlarged rather than erased her role. Her relationship with Mark Antony was the longest of her life, but her relationship with his rival, Augustus, was the most enduring. He would defeat Antony and Cleopatra. To Rome, to enhance the glory, he delivered up the tabloid version of an Egyptian queen, insatiable, treacherous, bloodthirsty, power-crazed. He magnified Cleopatra to hyperbolic proportions so as to do the same with his victory—and so as to smuggle his real enemy, his former brother-in-law (Antony), out of the picture. The end result is a nineteenth-century British life of Napoleon or a twentieth-century history of America, were it to have been written by Chairman Mao."

Schiff's description of Cleopatra's Alexandria leaves the reader with vivid impressions of what a fantastic city it was. The Alexandria of Cleopatra's time, however, now lies at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, a casualty of an earthquake hundreds of years ago. Likewise, the author's portrayal of Julius Caesar's Rome paints it as a rough and ugly place that would not gain its stature as a magnificent city until the first through third centuries.

Perhaps the most surprising fact to come out of this book is that Cleopatra did not die from the bite of an Egyptian asp. At the time of her death, Cleopatra had been a long-time captive of Octavian, well-guarded and unable to smuggle such a creature into her presence. Like any Ptolemy, she was an expert with poisons, a needed knowledge if one were to gain and keep a throne in ancient Egypt. The fact that Cleopatra's handmaidens died along with her gives further proof that she poisoned herself and the attendants did the same after they prepared her body. As Schiff contends, "Cleopatra's asp is the cherry tree of ancient history, a convenience, a shorthand, most of all a gift to painters and sculptors through the centuries. It made poetic sense and good art."

In a similar but truer manner, this biography is poetry and good art in writing.