



The Monthly Newsletter
of the First Friday
Breakfast Club, Inc.

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First Friday News & Views

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A Word or Two About the National Anthem

By Jonathan Wilson

Driving past Gray's Lake on my way to work on Monday, September 12, I was witness to a display of 3000 small American flags on the east bank of the lake catching the morning sun and a bit of a breeze. It was impressive; it was a lot of flags. It gave me pause.

Under that banner about as many American service members have died following the 9/11-inspired Afghanistan invasion, and still counting. One and a half times that number of Americans have died since the invasion of Iraq, and still counting. Ten times that number have been wounded physically; all who went have been wounded emotionally, and still counting. Unnumbered -- uncounted -- others have also died in those wars.

During that pause, I reflected on the recent scandal of sorts that was set off by pro football player Colin Kaepernick who took a knee rather than standing during the playing of our flag-hailing national anthem a couple of weeks prior. On 9/11/16, at least four members of the Dolphins NFL team did the same in solidarity with Kaepernick; another raised a fist.

The righteous indignation from flag-loving, so-called patriotic citizens has dominated the news since Kaepernick's act of defiance. It's challenged sports commentators, who have few credentials for discussing anything outside the game, to try talking about something of a serious nature. In the process they've reinforced their lack of bona fides beyond the game.

As a pacifist, I can remember the day when I had some serious reservations about the war-laden theme of our national anthem. I wanted to like the national anthem because it so powerfully sets the scene of an epic battle during the revolutionary war that eventually led to the founding of our nation. Despite my reservations, I still felt moved every time it was played.

On one occasion, however, when I expressed my frustration with the militarism of our national anthem, a good friend admonished me to listen to the words of the national anthem more carefully *and clear to the end*. I did so and it was eye opening.

Yes, the national anthem celebrates a battle in our revolutionary war and invites reverence for our flag, but it ends with a question -- an all-important question for our democracy: "Oh say does that star spangled banner yet wave o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?" It ends with a question! A question! A question that calls on us -- on every American -- to reflect and to answer every time we hear that anthem sung.

▼ The next FFBC Meeting is 7:00am, Friday, October 7, 2016, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA

▼ RSVP by October 5 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com, or phone 515-288-2500

Are there those among us who are not free? Not free from oppression, economic or otherwise? Not free from diminished opportunities, educationally or otherwise? Not free from discrimination, religious or otherwise? Not free from hunger? Not free from inadequate healthcare? Not free to walk the streets without fear? Not free to interact with police without apprehension because of one's race? Are there those needlessly in prison disproportionately thanks to the pigmentation of their skin?

It was that revolution after-all that gave birth to our Bill of Rights, including the right to freedom of expression, political or otherwise. Kaepernick reflected upon that anthem-ending question, answered it from a perspective that sees much room for improvement in our nation, and bravely chose to claim his right to express himself freely and publically. If the right to freedom of expression were only meant for cheerleaders (of which there are many, scantily dressed for our viewing pleasure, at every NFL game), the right would be essentially meaningless. You can have the rights of a cheerleader in almost every country in the world. The right to be a cheerleader is not one that's worth dying for. The right to speak out against the majority view in the hope that hearts and minds can be changed and a new consensus formed to improve the plight of every American, is something of value and something for which that revered flag stands.

It is a cruel irony that those critical of Kaepernick's expression of defiance during the national anthem, miss the point he was trying to make and, more importantly, miss the principle underlying the symbolic meaning of our flag.

The anthem ends with a question. A case can be made that there remain too many in our country who are not free. As far as I'm concerned, the flag still waives over the home of at least one very brave dude, Colin Kaepernick, who chose to exercise his freedom of expression. May his tribe increase.

Briefs & Shorts

Be sure to RSVP by October 5 for the October 7, 2016, meeting by calling 515-288-2500, or on line at: JonathanWilson@DavisBrownLaw.com. **Our speaker** on October 7 will be Jim Mowrer, candidate for the US House of Representative in Iowa's 3rd District. You may want to invite some of your friends to attend!!

Thanks to Byron Huff for serving as the master of ceremonies at the meeting in September, and for chairing the FFBC Board meeting on September 7. Thanks to Friedhelm Brinkhaus for introducing our September speaker, Jack Schuler, the first openly transgender teacher in the Des Moines Public Schools. Thanks to Brian Taylor Carlson for his terrific work updating the FFBC website (ffbc Iowa.org).

Thanks to Brad Holland and Joe Raetz for "seeding" an account with the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation in favor of FFBC with a contribution of \$10,000. You can follow their example with a contribution of any size. FFBC can draw down 5% of the principal every year into perpetuity. You can also join with other FFBC members giving \$100 to the David Hurd memorial scholarship; we just need 4 more to match his last gift of \$3000.

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. **Book donations are always welcome.** Thanks to Scott Kuknyo for helping coordinate the book exchange.



Consider a tax deductible contribution to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax exempt testamentary gift, or both. Contact Jonathan Wilson for details.

The next PROS meeting is September 24 at the home of Brian Taylor Carlson. Contact him for details and directions. BriInDSM@gmail.com.

The Truth Will Set You Free

By Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday, September 2, 2016, was Jack Schuler, the first openly transgender public-school teacher in Des Moines. The early-thirty-something Schuler, who was born a female and grew up in small-town Illinois, gave us a fascinating, frank, and moving account of his transition, which has been publicly in-process for only a couple of years: all last year – his first in a full-time teaching position – he taught English at Lincoln High School as Ms. Elyse Schuler.

Of course, Jack Schuler’s inner coming-out has been in process for thirty-something years, which perhaps accounts for his striking comfort and confidence in telling us his story. Some examples he shared with us: from the age of 5 until he was a teenager, his parents wouldn’t allow him to wear a baseball cap – because he kept being mistaken for a boy. And it took an act of God, he told us, to get him to wear a dress.

But growing up in a blue-collar, conservative, Catholic-dominated town, he had no visible models to help him understand his feelings. Not until he spent a high-school year abroad, in Japan, did it occur to him that cultural difference from what he’d always known could be an allowable thing. At Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, Schuler found a group of friends who allowed him to act on his evolving male identity. He started shopping exclusively in the men’s section and began to explore his sexuality, going from bisexual to lesbian and back to bisexual. “I felt safe to explore gender,” he told the Des Moines Register’s Courtney Crowder, “but I was still figuring out what my feelings meant and who, exactly, I was.”

After college, he decided to join the Marines, following in his father’s footsteps. While enlisted he married a man, using the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy to deflect rumors of his homosexuality. Schuler and his husband are now divorced but remain good friends, he said. Looking back, he can see that he was trying on all these different labels — punk, lesbian, theater-kid, Marine — in an attempt to suppress the one label that he desired most: “man.”

You can listen to the audio transcript of Schuler’s talk at <ffbc Iowa.org> to hear the many other highly interesting topics he addressed, including his gratitude for the emphatic support he has received both from Lincoln High School’s principal and staff and from the administration of the Des Moines Public Schools; the emotional effects of his hormone therapy; and the fun of his being a role-model both at Lincoln and as the first publicly noticed transgender Iowa State Democratic Elector (due to cast his ballot after November 8 if Hillary Clinton wins). “IF,” he emphasized. “I’m a Cubs fan and we don’t take anything for granted.”

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Jack Schuler was born in Streator, IL; where he was assigned female at birth and raised female. He attended Catholic schools and studied abroad in Japan his senior year of high school. He graduated from Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, IA in 2005 with a degree in Theater. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 2006 and served as a cryptologic linguist, deploying throughout Southeast Asia aboard the USS Essex and to South Korea. Upon completion of his service, Jack enlisted into the US Army Reserve as a chemical reconnaissance specialist and returned to Briar Cliff University. He graduated in 2014 with a degree in secondary education, English, and history. He currently teaches English at Abraham Lincoln High School in Des Moines.

P o m d e r T h i s

We might be a bit more forgiving of folks dealing with English as their second language when we are reminded: there’s no egg in eggplant, nor ham in hamburger. Neither apple nor pine in a pineapple. English muffins weren’t invented in England nor were French Fries invented in France. Sweetmeats are candies, while sweatbreads aren’t sweet and actually are meat. Quicksand can work slowly, boxing rings are square, and a guinea pig is neither from Guinea nor is it a pig.

How can a slim chance and a fat chance be the same? When the stars are out, they are visible, but when the lights are out, they are invisible. And “Buick” doesn’t rhyme with “quick.” Go figure.

When in doubt, resort to the truth.

There’s always a story behind the story, and the former is likely more interesting.



Senator McCoy Heads Back to School
*McCoy attends Harvard Kennedy School
Leadership Program in July*



I had the extraordinary privilege of participating in Harvard Kennedy School's Senior Executives in State and Local Government program this past July. The Victory Institute, in collaboration with The David Bohnett Foundation, has sent 118 outstanding LGBT leaders to this leadership program at Harvard as Bohnett Fellows, and I was humbled to be accepted as a fellow into this program. The fellowship is designed to develop a strong cohort of LGBT public officials from not only within the United States, but also around the world.

My experience at the Kennedy School was transformative. I was able to attend lectures related to vital issues impacting state leaders across the nation and around the globe. We were able to hear from Dan Finn, who served in the Kennedy Administration, and many more of the very best and brightest that the Kennedy School had to offer.

The ability to network with the 64 members of my class was invaluable to my learning experience. I could have never imagined the impact that this network of leaders would have on challenging the way that I approached problems and opportunities. The learning that took place inside and outside of the classroom was equally significant.

While at the program, we

were able to gather each evening as a class and discuss our state and organizational challenges. All members of the class were in significant leadership positions, ranging from chief of staffs, state legislators, city councilors, mayors of towns in other countries, and more. Democrats and republicans convened in our dorms to watch the political conventions and discuss issues impacting our nation. These experiences were very insightful and allowed for a variety of views to be expressed.

Our nation is divided. People are seeing the country they know and love change in ways that make them uncomfortable. Recent gun violence and attacks on the police are causing great anxiety. As our nation becomes increasingly stressed, it becomes easier to target Americans for polarizing arguments from both the right of center and left of center in our respective political parties.

People want to know where these leaders want to take America. They want to know that their leaders are working to keep them and their families safe. They want leaders to be able to communicate clearly and confidently about this uncertain future. Ultimately, people want to know what is being asked of them individually as citizens, and how they can accomplish this mission.

Ultimately, there are no simple solutions to the problems America is facing and will face in the next decade. I learned that leadership is about doing the right thing, despite the consequences and doing it at a rate the general public can tolerate.

My personal challenge is to recognize that leadership is all about personal relationships. I intend to spend more time with individuals whom I disagree with or may have conflicting views. By considering others' perspectives, I can view the world from another angle. I will work to lower the polarization and seek solutions to problems that allow for collaboration.

A Word or Two About Our National Parks

By Jonathan Wilson

This is the 100th anniversary of our National Park Service. Congratulations are in order. And, Yosemite has just added hundreds of acres to that park, the largest expansion of the park in 75 years. Wonderful I say. Today there are more than 400 national parks that preserve not only our natural heritage, but also maintains some of the most spectacular scenery in the world. Very impressive.

Those things being said, there is still something that is getting on my very last nerve. In 1967, Congress established the National Park Foundation, the officially designated charitable arm of the National Park Service. Because someone somewhere figured out sometime or other that I occasionally hug a tree or like to take a walk in the woods or some other unblemished landscape, I hear from the National Park Foundation about once a month begging for contributions. And, I've given the Foundation money from time-to-time, which doubtless encourages continued solicitations in keeping with the old adage that no good deed should go unpunished. By giving to the National Park Foundation I'm told that I'll have "the satisfaction of knowing that my donation is going directly to support the national parks." Frankly, at this point I've given more than any satisfaction

I've received. Fortunately, the tax deductibility of my contributions is not diminished by the satisfaction I've received in return.

Here's my beef. These are national parks. They belong to all of us collectively, rather like the interstate highways, the White House, the Capitol, our embassies around the world, and Air Force 1. They should be paid for, *and maintained*, by taxpayers collectively. They should not be funded disproportionately by those of us who are generous, those of us who are benevolent toward a worthy cause, who are -- okay, I'll say it -- those of us who are *not selfish*, or at least strive not to be. The selfish among us, and we all know there are some, should not be given a pass when it comes to financing our national assets. Such assets -- such treasures -- are owned by all of us and all of us who pay into the public coffers should be chipping in for the upkeep and maintenance. The national parks should be there, should be preserved at taxpayer expense to a standard that makes us proud, and should be available to all at no charge.

Let it not be said that I'm uncompromising. I'd be willing to let the generous among us, who believe in the public park system, pay for them, but with a dollar-for-dollar tax credit (not just a tax deduction) for contributions made to the National Park Foundation. That would almost certainly fund the national parks to a standard that will make us proud when they are inherited by our children and grandchildren.

McCoy, continued from Page 4

We are all Americans. We all love our country and cherish the freedoms and liberties that America offers. We need to find a way to work together in this uncertain future. We are best when we work as Americans and set aside our division and unite for common goals.

We should ask our Presidential nominees and other elected leaders where they want to lead America. What is their vision and can they easily communicate it to the American public? Finally, are they capable of doing this without scaring and manipulating Americans through fear and divisive tactics?

If we strive to find what is best in all of us, focus on personal relationships and common goals as Americans we will overcome whatever challenge we confront as a nation.

FFBC

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News & Views

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First Friday
Breakfast Club

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MADE ON A  MAC

Oh, To Be There Again!

By Steve Person

I have stated in previous book reviews that I believe Peter Ackroyd to be possibly the best writer of the English language in this or any other generation. Recently on a “book crawl” to Barnes and Noble, I came across his **Venice: Pure City**. Published in 2009, it is a comprehensive history and current comment on what is considered by many to be the world’s most beautiful city.

I wondered about the subtitle of “Pure City” until I came across this observance early on in the book: “Venice did not emerge from the union of rural peasantry. It was always urban.” Ackroyd notes that the people of Venice, even from its early beginnings in the fifth century, perpetually looked to and battled with the sea. It is, and always has been, a city of commerce. Its varied history has seen it develop into a naval power that conquered and later lost an empire, to its modern-day evolution as a premiere tourist attraction. Venice no longer dominates the Mediterranean but, rather, entices the rest of the world to bask in its quiet beauty.

Nowadays, Venice is a city of some 60,000 people scattered across 117 islands that are linked by bridges and canals. Getting “lost” in Venice is one of its chief enticements to the modern traveler. People may wander into a darkened passageway that evokes a spooky feeling of death just around the corner only to step around that corner and be in one of the many sun-drenched piazzas that dot the city. It is a city of wonder and awe.

Upon visiting Venice a decade ago, I was struck by the sounds of the city—or rather the lack of them. How pleasant it was to sit along the Grand Canal with a glass of wine and watch the world pass slowly by and listen to the conversations of the locals as they shopped or scurried onto a vaporetto (water taxi) while on their way home. Indeed, with zero automobiles, Venice is the quietest city I’ve ever been to. The vaporettos are engine driven but not allowed to kick up much wake, and the occasional outboard motor boats that float by are regulated, too. The world-famous gondolas are virtually noiseless unless the traveler is fortunate enough to have a singing gondolier whose voice echoes off the marble-faced palaces. No native stone exists in Venice, but Ackroyd asserts that the sea is the “stone” of Venice. “The stone glows with the inner translucence of the ocean. It glistens. It gleams. It shimmers.”

Venice was one of the world’s oldest republics, but it was a republic of oligarchs. The masses had no say in the running of the city’s governance. Selecting a doge to act as the head of government with the input of the Council of Ten was in no way a democratic process in the popular sense of that word. Doges served from year to year and could be re-elected but were always of an advanced age when chosen. That was on purpose. Selecting aged men to serve as doges kept the temptation of a dictator at bay.

The book is a fascinating study into the workings of a city that enticed visitors from ancient times to the present with its sense of beauty and civility.