



# First Friday



# News & Views

Monthly Newsletter of the First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.

January 2024 | Volume 29 | Issue 1

Next Meeting  
**Friday**  
**January 5**  
**7:00 a.m.**



Location  
**Hoyt Sherman**  
**15<sup>th</sup> & Woodland**  
**Des Moines**



Speaker  
**Representative**  
**Jennifer**  
**Konfrst**



Website  
**ffbc Iowa.org**



## FFBC Board Votes In Favor of Full Inclusion for Members

by Byron Huff, Board President

This month I want to recognize a **historic change** to the governing by-laws of the First Friday Breakfast Club (FFBC). On December 5, 2023, the Board voted to change membership to specifically include **“LGBTQ+ persons and their allies.”**

I thought I would highlight the historical membership changes to the original by-laws as established in 1996. The original section for membership stated the following: “Unless denied by action of the Board of Directors, each person who supports the mission and purposes of the corporation and pays the dues as established by the Board of Directors shall be entitled to membership and to vote in person or by proxy and to cast a ballot at membership meetings of the corporation.”

Although the by-laws were very inclusive, the Board had defined membership as a **gay men’s organization**. There was a membership “schism” at the January 2004 annual meeting where a number of members wanted to add lesbian and bisexual women to be eligible for membership. There was a special meeting called on March 5, 2004, specifically to address the definition of membership; the decision was ultimately decided to remain a men’s organization.

A committee was formed to review the by-laws and provide recommended updates; those updates were enacted after review and approval at two consecutive board meetings, the second of which occurred on April 6, 2005. The updated membership language stated: **“Gay and bisexual men** who support the mission and purposes of the corporation...”

Jump ahead to September 5, 2020; the Board voted to add **transgender men** to the roster eligible for membership; I am uncertain what precipitated this addition, but it seemed to make sense to include anyone who considered themselves a man to be included for membership.

The next membership change to add **“allies”** was approved on November 8, 2022; this was considered significant because it allowed **anyone** who supported the mission of FFBC to be a member by simply paying dues. The original intention was for members to pay dues for the year, but that has changed over the years as monthly and quarterly dues have become common. This would mean that anyone attending a meeting would be a member for that meeting and could vote if there was something presented.

Changes to the by-laws requires two consecutive board meetings for review and approval to be enacted; this provides an extra layer of protection to make sure all board members have input and have considered the ramifications of said change.

Organizations that wish to remain relevant must evolve to recognize the changing views of sexuality and gender. The sum of the changes to the FFBC by-laws to date acknowledge these changing views. Including all **“LGBTQ+ persons and their allies”** also aligns our organization with what we expect from our scholarship recipients. That is, advocating for equality and inclusion in their community. This change is a clear attempt to include all persons in our community in FFBC. These changes are simply the right thing to do in support of our mission and values.





# BREW & LEGISLATIVE PREVIEW

January 12  
The Slow  
Down Coffee

oneiowa

Friday, January 12, 2024; 8:00 - 9:00 A.M.  
Slow Down Coffee Co., 3613 6th Ave., Des Moines

Join **One Iowa**'s legislative experts for a preview (and update of the first few days) of the legislative session that begins in January 2024. *Hot coffee and donuts will be provided!*



**CAPITAL CITY PRIDE**

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 20**  
FREE EVENT  
AGES 21+

**BROADWAY SINGALONG**  
WITH DOMITA SANCHEZ

**NOCE JAZZ & CABERET**  
9:30 PM DOORS  
10 PM SHOW

**N**

## FFBC Scholarship Fundraising Campaign

**FFBC's annual "ask letter" has been mailed out.**

Your donations are a main source of funding for our educational scholarships each season, and **100%** of all donations will go directly toward scholarships for Iowa high school LGBTQ+ seniors and allies.

**Due to your incredible generosity, this past year we were able to present 14 scholarships for \$3,000!**

We hope that you will consider donating to FFBC so that we can continue to support outstanding, courageous Iowa students in 2024.



## Briefs & Shorts



Thanks to **Ken Hanson** for introducing our December speaker, the **Reverend Dr. Gregory Neal**. Thanks to **David Cotton** for managing our website, to **Nicholas Williams** for managing our Microsoft IT infrastructure, and to **David Wilfahrt** for managing FFBC's finances. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter editor. *Thank you to all our newsletter contributors!*

The **deadline** for the 2024 **February newsletter** will be **January 22**. If you have something on your mind to share, type it up and email it to Wade ([wadecpetersen@gmail.com](mailto:wadecpetersen@gmail.com)) by the deadline.



**Fundraising efforts** are ongoing to fund our scholarship program. To date we have awarded over **\$450,000** for scholarships to Iowa high school seniors who have done remarkable, courageous things to reduce homophobia and teach about LGBTQ issues in their schools and communities. Please consider a tax-deductible **contribution** online or by sending a check.



A special thank-you to those FFBC members and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the **Donor Direct** program of **United Way**. Contributions through United Way are tax deductible. Those who have chosen this means of supporting FFBC have gone to the trouble of completing their United Way campaign worksheet by designating FFBC as the beneficiary of their generosity. FFBC is an eligible recipient of such funding designations.





FFBC Scores  
at the



IOWA  
WOLVES

Pride  
Night



FFBC Board Members Phil Williams and Ken Hanson (taking the photo), along with Steve Dykhuis, host the FFBC Info Table at the Iowa Wolves December 3 Pride Night at Wells Fargo Arena

# Future Speakers



**February 2:**

**Ben Page**

Director, DSM Parks & Recreation

**March 1:**

**Rob Sand**

Iowa State Auditor

**April 5:**

**Melissa O'Neil**

CEO, Central Iowa Shelter & Services

**May 3:**

**Keenan Crow**

Director of Policy & Advocacy, One Iowa

**June 7:**

**Sarah Brown-Wessling**

2010 National Teacher of the Year

**July:**

**Donor-Member  
Summer Party**

**August 2:**

**Daniel Zinnel**

CEO of Proteus

 **IOWA LGBTQ  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

Iowa LGBTQ Chamber of Commerce is working together to advance the common business interests, economic growth, and equality in the workplace for Iowa's LGBTQ+ business community and its allies.

[iowalgbtqchamber.org](http://iowalgbtqchamber.org)







# When It Does Not Compute, Read the Fine Print

by Jonathan Wilson

I regularly get reminded that, if I spent time at the Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base in North Carolina between 1953 and 1987, and fell ill with a variety of unpleasant conditions, I might be eligible for compensation. I've never been to North Carolina, so these ads become a mere irritation for me. The only ads I've seen more of lately are those urging me to call a number to get a review of my Medicare Plan coverages and learn about other options that I may have, primarily touting Medicare Plan C, often called "Medicare Advantage." A few years back, I called the number, and a nice woman actually came to my home to pitch having me change to a Medicare Advantage Plan "available in my zip code."

The frequency of the Medicare Advantage ads has been driven mostly by the Annual Open Enrollment -- also known as the annual election period, which will have closed by the time you read this. The close of that annual open enrollment period won't, however, end the ads completely -- there are circumstances which would permit plan changes outside of that annual window, when anyone and everyone on Medicare can do so. But there will be fewer such ads until the Annual Open Enrollment period approaches in October of next year.

It should be understood by anyone being pitched to switched to a Medicare Advantage Plan, that all of those plans are provided by private, *for-profit* companies. Now, what does that mean and why is it important? The employees of every private, for-profit insurance company have a *fiduciary duty* to deny claims if there is any basis that can be found for doing so -- and a duty to search diligently for any such basis for claim denial. In the abstract, that may not seem all that important; the employees would just be doing their jobs. But, in practice, it proves to be very important.

An April 2022 report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (DHHS) disclosed that 13% of Medicare Advantage plans denied services that were likely covered under original Medicare and should have been covered and paid. That's 13% going directly to the for-profit company's bottom line. Those denials represent tens of thousands of tests and treatments that *should* have been approved and timely paid.



Print



In May of 2023 there was testimony before the U.S. Congress by DHHS, the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging, and the Marquette University College of Nursing, expressing concerns that Medicare Advantage plans inappropriately restrict access to medically necessary, covered services.

Considering the demographic of those supposedly covered -- the elderly -- the theoretical right to appeal a denial, and the time an appeal would consume, don't provide a meaningful remedy. "Your call is important to us . . . please hold (until it's no longer important to you)." Delayed coverage can be lethal for those without the financial resources to advance the cost of tests/treatments that have initially been wrongfully denied.

But there's more. The Medicare Advantage Plan ads promise additional benefits not provided by original Medicare such as dental, vision, and other benefits *at ZERO additional premium*. Now think about that message coming from a for-profit company, and think about the axioms that "you don't get something for nothing," or "if it sounds too good to be true, it likely isn't true." And then think about the fact that for-profit insurance companies employ legions of actuaries before formulating supposed benefits to be provided for whatever premium. If the additional benefits beyond those available from the NOT-for-profit original Medicare plan, do not generate additional premiums, it does not compute.

The only way to make it compute has to be buried in the *fine print* where the cost of added benefits or the risk about who pays those costs (the insurer or the insured), makes the plan remain profitable. And, you guessed it; the employees of the for-profit insurance companies, who have the fiduciary duty to deny claims if the policy so provides, are trained to be very familiar with the fine print.





# LGBTQ+ Philanthropy



Which organizations will you financially support in 2024?

<p>First Friday Breakfast Club</p> <p><a href="http://ffbciaowa.org">ffbciaowa.org</a></p>	<p>Pride Sports League</p> <p><a href="http://pridesportsleague.org">pridesportsleague.org</a></p>	<p>Human Rights Campaign</p> <p><a href="http://hrc.org">hrc.org</a></p>	<p>Lavender Legal Center</p> <p><a href="http://lavenderlegalcenter.org">lavenderlegalcenter.org</a></p>	<p>Capital Bears</p> <p>CAPITAL BEARS DES • MOINES • IOWA</p> <p><a href="http://capitalbears.org">capitalbears.org</a></p>
<p>ACLU of Iowa</p> <p><a href="http://aclu-ia.org">aclu-ia.org</a></p>	<p>Imperial Court of Iowa</p> <p><a href="http://imperialcourtofiowa.org">imperialcourtofiowa.org</a></p>	<p>Rainbow Railroad</p> <p>RAINBOW RAILROAD</p> <p><a href="http://rainbowrailroad.org">rainbowrailroad.org</a></p>	<p>One Iowa</p> <p><a href="http://oneiowa.org">oneiowa.org</a></p>	<p>Q Exchange</p> <p><a href="https://facebook.com/theqexchangedsm">facebook.com/theqexchangedsm</a></p>
<p>The Project</p> <p><a href="http://phctheproject.org">phctheproject.org</a></p>	<p>The Trevor Project</p> <p><a href="http://thetrevorproject.org">thetrevorproject.org</a></p>		<p>GLSEN</p> <p><a href="http://glsen.org">glsen.org</a></p>	<p>Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus</p> <p><a href="http://dmgmc.org">dmgmc.org</a></p>
<p>Clock, Inc.</p> <p><a href="http://clockinc.org">clockinc.org</a></p>	<p>Iowa Safe Schools</p> <p><a href="http://iowasafeschools.org">iowasafeschools.org</a></p>	<p>Tyler Clementi Foundation</p> <p><a href="http://tylerclementi.org">tylerclementi.org</a></p>	<p>Prime Timers of Central Iowa</p> <p>Private Facebook Group</p>	<p>It Gets Better Project</p> <p><a href="http://itgetsbetter.org">itgetsbetter.org</a></p>
<p>Des Moines Pride Center</p> <p><a href="http://desmoinespridecenter.org">desmoinespridecenter.org</a></p>	<p>Des Moines Diversity Chorus</p> <p><a href="http://desmoinesdiversitychorus.org">desmoinesdiversitychorus.org</a></p>	<p>Transformations Iowa</p> <p><a href="https://www.facebook.com/transformationsiowa">www.facebook.com/transformationsiowa</a></p>	<p>PFLAG</p> <p><a href="http://pflag.org">pflag.org</a></p>	<p>Capital City Pride</p> <p><a href="http://capitalcitypride.org">capitalcitypride.org</a></p>







## January Speaker

# Representative Jennifer Konfrst



Jennifer Konfrst was born on December 24, 1973, in Macomb, Illinois. She grew up in Des Moines, Fort Dodge, and Webster, Florida. She graduated with a bachelors of arts degree in journalism and mass communications and a masters of public administration from Drake University. She worked for Iowa PBS for twelve years. She is an associate professor of journalism and strategic political communication at Drake University. She and her husband, Lee, have two children.

She first ran to represent the 43rd district in the Iowa House of Representatives in 2016, but lost to republican incumbent Chris Hagenow. In 2018, Hagenow moved to the 19th district. Konfrst ran again for the newly open seat and won. She won re-election in 2020. Konfrst sits on the administration and rules committee, the judiciary committee, the local government committee, the state government committee, and the transportation committee. She was the assistant minority leader in 2019 and 2020 and the minority whip in 2021. When Todd Prichard stepped down as the House minority leader in 2021, Konfrst was elected on June 14, 2021 as the new House minority leader. She is the first woman to hold this position in Iowa. In 2022 she ran for re-election and won in the 32nd district against Republican Mark Brown.



## Speaker Series

[Tickets are free, but you must register online]

January 11 / 6:00 P.M. / Temple Theater

### Tiq Milan

Tiq Milan speaks and writes about intersectional leadership, transgender rights, and racial justice. He shares stories of his life and how his transgender experience has informed his views on masculinity, race, and the gender binary. A journalist for over a decade, his work has appeared on MIC, BuzzFeed, NBC, and CNN.



**“Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every new year find you a better man.”**



**Benjamin Franklin**





# A Long Journey to Reconciliation

by Gary Moore



The Reverend Dr. Gregory S. Neal, the Senior Pastor at Grace United Church in Des Moines, was our speaker for the December gathering and our holiday season speaker at Hoyt Sherman Place. The Des Moines landmark was decorated for the holiday, and many in the gay community were looking forward to the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus concert at Hoyt Sherman Place Saturday evening.

Prior to coming to Grace UMC as Senior Pastor, the Rev. Neal served for more than 30 years in the North Texas Conference, leading a multi-ethnic church, two reconciling congregations, two inner-city churches, and a vibrant university church. Reverend Neal is married to Kade Rogers, who is a motivational speaker, a specialist in communications and administration, an accomplished singer/songwriter, and an activist for the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in the United Methodist Church. Over the past few years, they have engaged in ministry together in the local church and the LGBTQ+ community, each complementing the gifts and graces of the other.

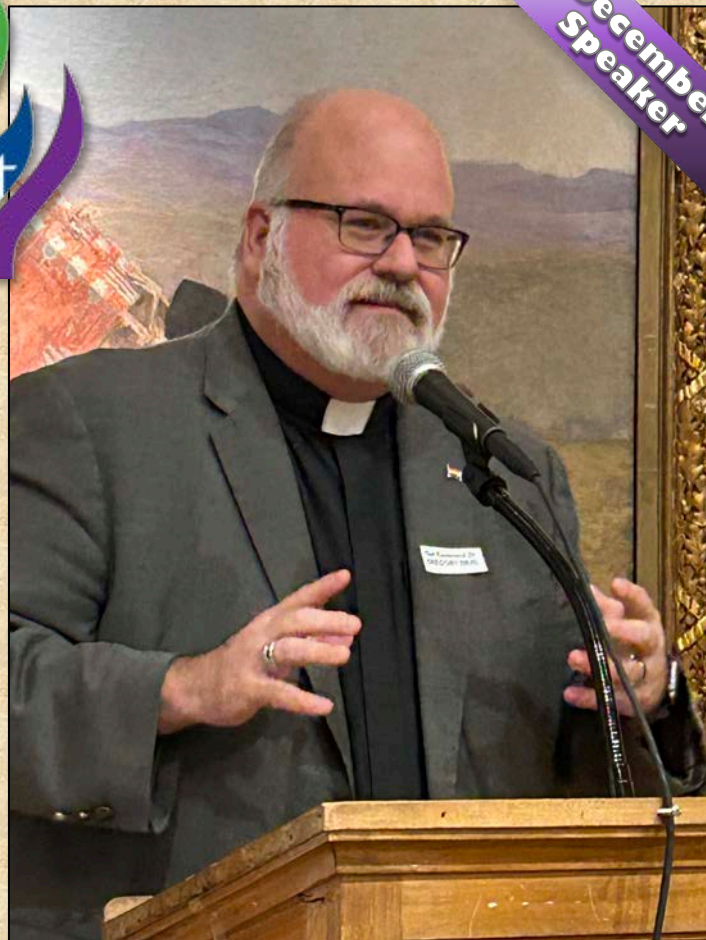
They have, in the last year, joined the Grace United Methodist Church here in Des Moines.

Reverend Neal shared his story of being sent to reparative therapy as an adolescent of 14. Exodus International originally asserted that conversion therapy, the reorientation of same-sex attraction, was possible. The Reverend noted this is what loving families did in the early 80s, unaware of the deep and lasting damage it would do.

The Reverend shared his story of progressing from an adolescent boy wanting to deny that very important part of himself. Being gay and hiding in the closet, he kept busy with his ministry, suppressing his real self. Receiving his first reconciling and affirming church allowed him to come out in 2007.

But a new assignment was like walking into a dark cave. Through having a good therapist, Reg Greg Neal was able to come out of the self-loathing closet. That, along with meeting his husband and trying to plan their wedding, led to the long process the church put them through to get them to an affirming congregation.

There is still change waiting to happen within the Methodist Church; the Reverend feels significant change is near.



December Speaker

The Reverend Dr. Gregory S. Neal



Reverend Greg Neal & husband, Kade Rogers



# December Meeting Photo Gallery



Photos  
By  
Gary  
Moore  
&  
Wade  
Petersen



Ken Hanson Introduces the Speaker





Thanks to Brad Holland and Joe Raetz, the Ascendant Wealth Management sponsorship helps FFBC to cover its website hosting costs, as well as its website e-commerce technology which allows for online scholarship donations and dues payments.



## Brad Holland

Financial Advisor

Chartered Retirement Planning Counselor  
Ascendant Wealth Management Group

(515) 697-7151

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**THANKS BRAD & JOE !**

## FFBC Membership

FFBC membership is open to all members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies. We welcome all guests, regardless of sexual orientation or gender. Meetings are held the first Friday of every month from 7:00 A.M. - 8:15 A.M. at Hoyt Sherman Place in Des Moines. The following membership and guest rates help us cover our food and facility costs.

### In-Person Meeting Rates (Members & Guests)

**Annual Rate: \$180**  
(12 consecutive meetings)

**Quarterly Rate: \$48**  
(3 consecutive meetings)

**Month-by-Month: \$18**

**First Time or One-Time Attendee: \$15**

**Full-time Student: \$8**

**No charge to attend via Zoom**

### Payment Options

Cash or check at the meeting

Credit card prior to the meeting at [www.ffbciaowa.org](http://www.ffbciaowa.org); visit the "Membership" tab

### Meeting Schedule

6:30 a.m. - Doors open

6:45 a.m. - Breakfast service begins

7:00 a.m. - Meeting begins



## **"New Year's Resolution:**

**To tolerate fools more gladly, provided this does not encourage them to take up more of my time."**

**- James Agate**





# The End of the Iowa Caucuses



by Supervisor Matt McCoy  
Polk County, 1<sup>st</sup> District



Following the 2020 Iowa Democratic Caucus debacle, the Democratic National Committee decided that Iowa would no longer hold the cherished title as the first state to vote in the presidential democratic primary. The implications of this decision have subjugated Iowans to a one-sided race where massive amounts of campaign spending have occurred for Republican challengers and their Super PACs.

The Biden Team was clearly ready to be done with Iowa, especially since coming in fifth in the 2020 Iowa Democratic Caucuses. If Trump were to be the nominee, regardless of whether he wins the Iowa Caucuses next month, he may say good-bye to Iowa's first in the nation status in four years. There could be many reasons as to why, but one of the greatest being Governor Kim Reynolds' endorsement of Governor Ron DeSantis in next month's caucuses. In four years, Iowa Republicans could be feeling what Iowa Democrats are feeling now. The first-in-the-

nation status has been a great run for Iowa over the past fifty years, but it soon could be coming to an end and Iowa will be relegated to flyover country.

Anyone can register to vote at the Democratic or Republican caucuses on Caucus night—January 15 at 7 p.m. For Republicans, follow this link to your caucus location and to find out more information:

<https://www.iowagop.org/2024caucus>.

Democrats will also hold caucuses but mostly for party business. To request a mailed presidential preference card and for caucus information, follow this link:

<https://iowademocrats.org/caucus/>.

Results of the mail-in Presidential preference will be released on March 5, 2024—the same day as Super Tuesday.



FFBC President Byron Huff accepts a \$1,000 donation from the Misty Soldwisch Home Selling Team in Indianola to be used for scholarships for Iowa LGBTQ+ high school seniors and allies. Thank you!



# Batman: Mask of the Phantasm

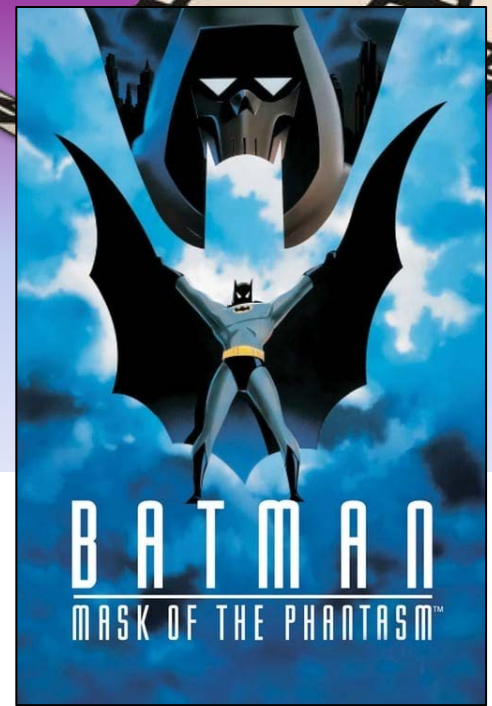
A Retro Movie Review by Mark Turnage

As a fan, friends sometimes ask me, “Mark, what’s your favorite Batman film?” When I point them to Eric Radomski and Bruce Timm’s *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*, their response is typically a skeptical, “—but why an animated movie?” December 25th marks the 30th anniversary of *Mask of the Phantasm*, originally released in theaters Christmas 1993. Featuring the voice talents of the Emmy-Award winning *Batman: The Animated Series*, the film’s adult themes, multilayered mystery, overt noir tone, and vulnerable portrayal of the Dark Knight distinguish this Batman movie most from its contemporaries.

While Batman (an iconic Kevin Conroy) busts a Gotham City counterfeiting operation, mobster Chuckie Sol is menaced by a suspect dressed like the Grim Reaper -- The Phantasm --culminating in Sol’s vehicle plunging from a parking garage into an adjacent building, and Batman being spotted at the murder scene. After a couple unpleasant social encounters at his own house party that evening, Bruce Wayne is informed that his ex-fiancée Andrea Beaumont (Dana Delaney) is returning to Gotham after a decade -- whose chemistry and contentment nearly caused Bruce to abandon his mission as Batman before it even began. When a second mobster is murdered in Gotham Cemetery, witnesses again mistake the caped figure for Batman, and the GCPD quickly assembles a heavily armed task force to hunt down a vigilante who they believe has turned lethal.

*Phantasm* leans into the Caped Crusader’s film noir roots -- lost loves,

rumination on past choices, and broken dreams are recurring themes in this story, as well as perspectives from both sides of the law. Central to the story is a past relationship of Bruce Wayne’s and how formative it was in his journey to becoming Batman. But rather than coming across as tacked-on history, *Phantasm* invests not only emotional depth in younger Bruce’s desperation for happiness and in his tough, flirty ex-fiancée Andrea Beaumont, but manages to craft a three-layer mystery involving a mob serial killer, the return of an old flame into Bruce’s life, and the involvement of the Joker (a wicked Mark Hamill), who becomes his own perverse “detective” in one of the most brilliant subversions of the character. The film uses the animated series’ style of “Dark Deco” to illustrate Gotham City with shadowy geometric landscapes, with in-universe technology that’s both present-day yet wildly reminiscent of the 40s era Batman originated from. This can be off-putting to some who are used to the complexity of modern computer animation, and there are a couple hand-drawn action sequences that noticeably suffer from choppy cel animation, but the strength of the film’s storytelling is enough to overlook them. The movie does use flashbacks frequently for narrative exposition, yet it doesn’t slow down the pace -- *Phantasm* is my favorite inversion of the “three hour superhero movie” trend, clocking in at a brisk one hour and fifteen minutes. Shirley Walker’s operatic score elevates this Batman story to epic proportions.



Yet arguably what makes this a definitive Batman portrayal is how it portrays Bruce trying to bargain with “the mission” vs. his own happiness. In one pivotal scene, a distraught Bruce pleads at his parents’ headstone, begging how he “needs it to be different now,” offering to fund the city with his fortune and abandon the mission of Batman because he “never expected to be happy.” It’s a wrenching scene that speaks volumes to how Bruce acknowledges Batman as a dauntingly painful but self-imposed burden. We see how this Batman was born: not just out of grief or vengeance, but also from heartbreak.

*Batman: Mask of the Phantasm* is an ideal film for those who want more depth from their superheroes, nearly two decades before its own genre became mainstream. See it streaming on MAX.





Immerse yourself in an unforgettable evening with the Varsity Theater, Central Iowa Rainbow Families, One Iowa, and Capital City Pride as they present a captivating screening of **“We Live Here: The Midwest.”**

This thought-provoking film delves into the poignant and timely narratives of LGBTQ+ families navigating the challenges of biased legislation and surmounting prejudice while endeavoring to forge meaningful lives within their communities.

Following the screening, embark on a journey of personal reflections as Katie and Nia Chiamonte generously share their experiences and illuminate the profound impact the film has had on their family. The Chiamonte family, once residents of Indianola, takes center stage in this compelling cinematic exploration.

Join us for an evening of connection, empathy, and celebration, where diverse stories converge to inspire change. This event is not only an opportunity to witness powerful narratives but is also **FREE** and open to the public, inviting everyone to be a part of this transformative experience.

# FILM SCREENING & TALK BACK

Ft. local family from Indianola

JAN 20  
3:30 PM

The Varsity  
1207 25th St.  
Des Moines



Organized by:



# ballet DES MOINES

## Love Letters



Join us in a celebration of love, resilience, and self-discovery!

This season, Ballet Des Moines is extending an open invitation to everyone in the LGBTQ+ community to share your stories through the art of dance.

### Write a Love Letter to Your Past or Future Self

Let your words become the heartbeat of a groundbreaking new ballet by our very own Artistic Director, Tom Mattingly. Your stories will shape a powerful narrative of queer joy, hope, love, and bravery—a collective resistance against challenges that may seem insurmountable.

### Your Participation Matters

We believe in the strength of collaboration and creativity as catalysts for positive change. Your partnership is an honor, and we commit to treating your submissions with the utmost care and respect. Your unique experiences deserve to be seen, celebrated, and immortalized on stage.

### Submission Details

Visit Ballet Des Moines' online platform at [www.balletdesmoines.org/loveletters-lgbtq](http://www.balletdesmoines.org/loveletters-lgbtq) to submit your letters. **The deadline is January 31.** Your voice matters, and we can't wait to be inspired by your journey.



### Premiere Information

Save the date for the unveiling of Tom Mattingly's extraordinary creation based on your submissions. Join us in Des Moines on **March 8 & 9** for a performance that promises to be a beautiful reflection of the diversity and strength within the LGBTQ+ community.

Let's come together, amplify our voices, and dance towards a more inclusive future!



## Board of Directors

David Cotton	Gene Larson
Jim Flansburg	Deb Madison-Levi
Ken Hanson	Wade Petersen
Brad Holland	Joe Raetz
Byron Huff	David Wilfahrt
Scott Kuknyo	Phil Williams

Jonathan Wilson (Emeritus)

Contact Us At: [info@ffbcia.org](mailto:info@ffbcia.org)

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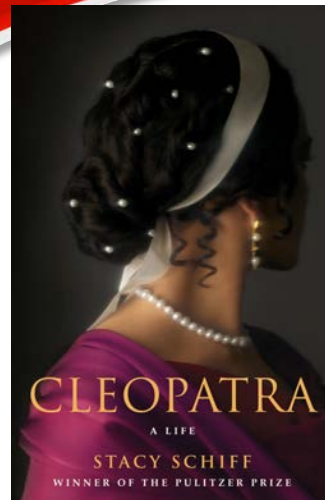
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**FFBC Board  
of Directors**

First Friday Breakfast Club  
P.O. Box 41611  
Des Moines, IA 50311  
(515) 954-2996

# Cleopatra: A Life

By Stacy Schiff

**A  
Book  
Review by  
Steve Person**



Occasionally, I will re-read a book that I enjoyed earlier. This book is one of them. I read it about twelve years ago, and I am glad I returned to it because I had forgotten so much.

Forget everything you think you know about Cleopatra, especially if you are an Elizabeth Taylor fan. For one thing, no one knows what Cleopatra looked like. The dust cover of the book shows the head of Cleopatra from behind. The only images that remain are imprinted on a few coins issued during her life. After her death, the Romans destroyed all her writings, and the only sources Schiff had to use came from some contemporaries of the Queen of the Nile and later Roman historians—namely Plutarch. The author writes, "...Cleopatra's Egypt produced no fine historian. One can only read accordingly. The sources may be flawed, but they are the only sources we have. There is no universal agreement on most of the basic details of her life, no consensus on who her mother was, how long Cleopatra lived in Rome, how often she was pregnant, whether she and Antony married, what transpired at the battle that sealed her fate, how she died." History has only one written line that Cleopatra (or perhaps a scribe) uttered: "Let it be done."

Cleopatra managed to survive in a family that frequently exiled or murdered parents, brothers, sisters, or anyone who tried to inherit the throne of Egypt. Even she became exiled while still a teenager and lived three years in the Syrian desert. The oft used anecdote of how she presented herself to Julius Caesar rolled up in a fine rug is rubbish. She and only one of her supporters slipped into the palace in Alexandria in a pile of dirty laundry. Fortunately, Julius Caesar wrote copious details of his daily life on and off the battlefields of Ancient Rome.

Cleopatra's father saw to it that she was well educated, and she was fluent in at least five languages, but Latin wasn't one of them. Likewise, Caesar spoke many languages, and it is likely that he and she conversed in Greek. The Ptolemies who ruled Ancient Egypt for over 300 years were, in fact, Macedonian Greeks. The Alexandria of Ancient Egypt stood as one of the most glorious cities in the Mediterranean. Rome, by comparison, had barely begun to develop into the powerhouse it would later become in the first centuries A.D.

Schiff asserts that Cleopatra may or may not have been in love with both Julius Caesar and Marc Antony. She did, however, use them to her advantage in both personal and political matters. She cleverly ruled Egypt for 22 years, adding more wealth and influence with each passing year. Even when she absented herself to other parts of the world, she employed able subjects to keep the country running smoothly. She lived magnificently, and she died so effectively that her Roman enemies could not exploit her for their propaganda purposes.

Speaking of her suicide, it is most unlikely that Cleopatra hid a poisonous snake in a basket of figs. The woman knew her poisons and how to use them. It is most likely that she used a combination of poisons similar to those used by Socrates including hemlock. They produced a quick and essentially painless death.

A fascinating woman and a fascinating book.

