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First Friday News & Views

OF FINGERS AND TOES AND TWO DOLLAR BILLS

by Jonathan Wilson

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CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, October 7, 2011, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by October 5 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

I read this interesting story in **The Des Moines Register** on August 27, 2011, complete with picture. It was about Yoandri Hernandez Garrido, a 37-year-old guy from Baracoa, Cuba. Turns out that the guy has six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. He's known affectionately as "24." Now mind you, these are fully formed and fully functional "extra" digits. And he's not alone. There are enough people like him that there's a name for it. He and others like him are polydactyl. The picture of his hands look like the hands of anyone else until you take a closer look, count fingers, recount fingers, and go, "Huh. How 'bout that. Interesting."

The story got me to thinking about him, four-leaf clover, 2 dollar bills, and gay children of God. So what do Yoandri ("24"), four-leaf clover, 2 dollar bills, and gay children of God have in common? Try this: they all exist; they are completely authentic, valid, and "normal." Not normative, I'll grant you. Most people don't have six fingers on each hand; most clover has three leaves; 2 dollar bills are not the customary currency in use today, and gay children of God are a minority demographic. But, so what?

Yoandri functions just fine; he probably has a better grip than some. We consider it lucky to find that rare four-leaf clover. I carry and spend 2 dollar bills all the time and find them readily accepted despite their unfamiliarity (other than the one time that a not-so-bright McDonald's employee declined to accept one until her better educated manager said it would be okay). Often as not the cashier will buy my 2 dollar bill from the register right on the spot and cherish it or give it as a gift.

And gay children of God have been around throughout human history, and they have made positive contributions to society for all of that time (and despite periodic renunciation, condemnation, discrimination, and even criminalization). We've been productive citizens despite the odds, which is to our credit. It makes the contributions all the more impressive.

These examples are relevant in confronting those of our detractors who insist that being gay, or gay folks engaging in same-gender sexual intimacy, are not normal or natural. Our detractors are wrong. Clearly, the majority of human beings are not gay, and for them same-gender intimacy is not normal or natural. Fair enough. They need to get over their parochialism. Gay people do exist. When we engage in intimacy with one another, it is perfectly normal and natural. We should not be taught otherwise. We should not be closeted and encouraged, unwisely, to marry unsuspecting straight people. It's not normal. It's not natural. It's contrived. It's an abomination.

I recently returned from another photographic safari to Africa. I was again struck with the remarkable diversity of species that evolution has generated. Truly remarkable and fascinating. One diverse species is not inherently better or worse than another. Each seems to contribute in its own unique way to the balance of nature. Over time, adaptive changes occur within species that strengthen them.

That we live undeniably in an over-populated world, it is arguably a good thing that homosexuality is gaining greater acceptance. Gay folks are capable of reproducing (I have two beautiful children), but less likely to do so than "breeders." Gay people will be even less likely to reproduce if we're not pushed into opposite-gender marriages. The Lord does work in mysterious ways.

(Continued from page 1)

God created diversity and, as Yoandri demonstrates, continues to create diversity today. Human beings created discrimination. Who ya' going to trust?

Gay people look pretty much like everyone else. We have our strengths and weaknesses. Upon closer examination, however, lo and behold, we are different than the majority in this one respect. As a society we need to get to the point of saying, non-judgmentally, "Huh. How 'bout that. Interesting." We're getting closer to that point every day.



Dr. Dwight Watson

by Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on the first Friday of September 2011 was Dr. Dwight C. Watson, since July of 2010 Dean of the College of Education at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. Dr. Watson -- "Dwight," he insisted -- spoke movingly of his closeted youth, growing up in the Piedmont of South Carolina, and of his career as an educator. But now, he said (50 years later) he's finding great joy and promise in the pop culture of today's teenagers, and he quoted enthusiastically several songs by such artists as Lady Gaga to prove his point.

The insistence on diversity and "being who you are" that Watson sees today is a far cry from 1960s Sumter, South Carolina, where he found himself an "outlaw:" smart, fat, black, and not interested in girls. So he immersed himself in his Baptist religion and his schoolwork; now he realizes that he used his overweight as a "beard" for his secret sexuality, letting folks assume that he didn't date because the girls thought he was too fat. He was 33 before he finally came out to his mother (who, in the time-honored way, told him that she "sorta knew").

Starting out as an elementary school teacher, Watson has since taken his passions -- for Literacy as Access and for making safe places for every kind of student -- all around the country, both in his own continuing education and in professorial and administrative posts in several school systems and universities. As was revealed in questions after his speech, he has stayed connected with his Christian roots. He can understand (without condoning it) why it's so difficult for fundamentalists to accept such "outlaw" ideas as same-sex marriage. As he tells his Iowa-bred, budding teachers at UNI: the place where you've come from is not the place where you'll be teaching

when you leave here, and it's my job to help you embrace that, even rejoice in it.

Dwight C. Watson received his B.A. and M.Ed. in elementary education from the University of South Carolina in Columbia. He received his Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction with a concentration in reading and writing literacy from North Carolina State University in Raleigh. Dr. Watson taught elementary and middle grades for ten years in Raleigh and Sumter. He has taught on the university level for seven years as an assistant and associate professor of education and the Director of Elementary Programs at Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina. Dr. Watson has also been a central office administrator for a large, urban school district and served as the Language Arts Program Director. As Program Director, he supervised the language arts, reading, and writing curriculum and staff development for 64 elementary schools as well as orchestrated programs for Title I and Reading Recovery.

Dr. Watson was the Associate Dean of Teacher Education Program and Chair of the Departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Foundations of Education at the University of Wisconsin -- Eau Claire. Previous to that he was an associate professor of education at Hamline University in St. Paul. Dr. Watson is now the Dean of the College of Education at the University of Northern Iowa. His current research interests are curriculum integration, children's literature, and conflict resolution. Dr. Watson conducts numerous local, state, national, and international workshops on his research interests as well as other areas of reading and writing literacy. You can write to him at dwight.watson@uni.edu.



Retrieved from www.npr.org from

"With Repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,' An Era Ends"
by Liz Halloran

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

2

Torture – the easy definition: That which you would call torture if it were done to someone you love.

Our Idiot Brother And Another Earth

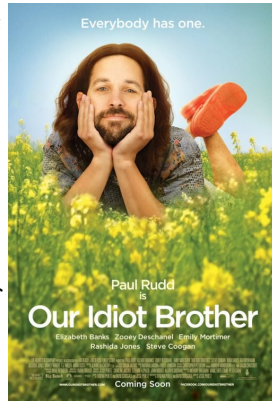
Review By Gary Kaufman

With a title like **Our Idiot Brother**, one would expect the film to be one of those movies starring Will Ferrell or David Spade where the IQ of the writing staff approaches that of the character they are trying to portray. But this film is a very thoughtful and well-written comedy about a man who lives his life by putting his trust out there with the belief that people will rise to the occasion and be truthful themselves and show that trust was deserved. Although there is evidence that Ned, the title character, played by Paul Rudd, is an idiot when he hands a uniformed police officer some marijuana after the officer tells him that the officer had experienced “a really bad week” and needed the smoke. It also illustrates the ridiculousness of a society that throws someone into prison for minor marijuana violations, but the resulting prison time puts Ned in a situation where his health farm sweetheart dumps him for another farm hand, and he has no place to go but back to his mother’s for the weekly family Sunday meal. Unfortunately, one of his three sisters mentions that “her door is always open” to him, and Ned is eventually passed around from sister to sister.

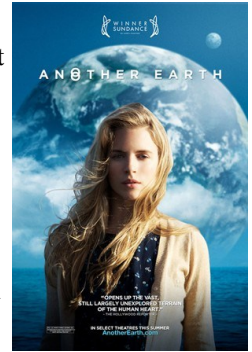
Although Ned is considered by the sisters to be the “idiot brother,” he actually has the moral high ground over all of the sisters, and in his open, believing way, gets along with people around him marvelously. One sister has two kids and a husband that shows no sexual interest in her but shows lots of interest in the subject of his current documentary. Another sister (who is moving in with her lesbian lawyer lover) is a brand new reporter for **Variety Fair** and is dying to get the scoop on the foreign millionaire, Lady Arabella (Janet Montgomery), who’s boyfriend has stolen \$10M from her family and then sells sex tapes of the couple to pay for his lawyer’s fees. The third sister is too bossy to be in a relationship. Through Ned’s presence in the lives of these three sisters, his honesty and integrity disrupts all of their lives, and Ned ends up back in jail. By the movie’s end, their lives are resolved for the better, and Ned’s life is starting to look up as well.

It is a very satisfying comedy. Warm, fuzzy, and funny!
— **Another Earth** —

I went to a really unusual movie recently that might interest you all. It is called **Another Earth**, and it is a story in which there appears in the sky another Earth and the moon. As the movie progresses, the Earth in the sky gets bigger and bigger, and they discover that it is another parallel Earth where



each of us would have a person on that earth with our name and our experiences. It raises such questions as, what if we traveled there and encountered ourselves and experience ourselves from outside. What would we say to each other? It is a slow movie, sometimes almost painfully slow, but if you stick with it, there is a really strong payoff at the end. It also deals with healings of the human spirit after a severely traumatizing event.



My only trouble with the movie was as an aerospace engineering graduate, I know that, physically, if another earth appeared in the sky as it does in this movie it would be cataclysmic -- the ocean tides would be tremendous and the two planets would either tear each other apart or severely alter their orbits perhaps making us swing out beyond the solar system. So I had to suspend the scientist/physicist portion of myself, which was hard actually. But I doubt if most people would have that traumatizing problem. Ha!

It played at the Fleur Cinema.

Life is simpler when you plow around the stumps.

Two silk worms were in a race. They ended up in a tie.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the October 7 meeting no later than October 5. E-mail JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Rebecca Gruber, director of the Des Moines Gay Men’s Chorus.

Thanks to Scott Kleinfelter for his introduction of our September speaker, Dr. Dwight Watson of the University of Northern Iowa. Thanks also to Byron Huff for filling in as the emcee at the September meeting.

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 .

Consider a tax deductible contribution to the FFBC Scholarship Fund. Also, consider designating FFBC as a targeted recipient of your United Way pledge; FFBC is an approved designee. You’ll get credit at work for your participation and help FFBC at the same time .

FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views
Des Moines, Iowa*

OCTOBER 2011

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My M.O. (Monthly Observations)

TRANSPARENT

Review by Steve Person

Like so many others, I am a news junkie. I like to watch the local and national news programs. Locally, I prefer KCCI news coverage and, nationally, I watch either the CBS Evening News and/or PBS. I like CBS up to the point where they start doing their so-called “investigative” reports. I do not appreciate this kind of journalism for my nightly news. While there is certainly a need for that kind of reporting, it better belongs to **60 Minutes** and other similar programs. For me, Sergeant Joe Friday got it right when he said, “Just the facts, ma’am. All we want are the facts.” That’s when I tune into PBS. It is the closest this country can get to the mother of all great news organizations, the **BBC World News**. I also like CNN, especially for its political coverage. The one “news” program I avoid at all costs is **Fox News**. I find those two words mutually incompatible.

All this brings me to the latest book I am reading. It is called **Transparent** and is the autobiography of CNN news anchor, Don Lemon. Of all the news anchors on television, he is the one I like the most. I have always enjoyed watching him, and after reading this book, I like him even more. The book’s chapters are divided into 19 “lessons,” each with its own theme.

In the third chapter, “A Lesson About Loss,” Lemon divulges that he was sexually abused as a child. The molestation went on for quite some time, and he kept it secret for many years. The perpetrator was a teenaged friend of one of his older sisters.

I was initially drawn to watching Lemon on CNN because he is such a handsome African-American male. His on-camera persona is pleasant and yet serious when a particular story calls for such gravity. I always hoped that Don Lemon was gay. His particular emphasis on gay-related topics in his reporting led me to hope that he was. As it turns out, he is! In the eighth chapter, “A lesson in Gratitude,” he says, “Since I was knee high to a duck, I’ve known that I was gay...” Good for him!

The book further chronicles his relationship with those of and not of his race. A particularly interesting insight was in chapter six, “A Lesson on the ‘Black Box.’” He states, “Again and again in my life, I’ve run up against those who have limited ideas about what and who black Americans are, and sometimes expressions of those limitations have come from black people themselves. I call these beliefs the black box and I got my first real black box lessons in high school.” Lemon relates that members of his own race in school did not like that he made friends with so many white kids in his class. “Now, almost 30 years later, I’m still having those experiences.”

As I read the book, I couldn’t help but think about the situation with our local NAACP chapter. When Jonathan and I attended the August meeting, the “Unwelcome Mat” was rolled out, and very many of those present did their level best to marginalize our participation in their organization. This atmosphere was in direct contrast to our initial experience in July when we and two other FFBC members joined up and were warmly received. All I can say is that I wish those in charge of the local chapter would read Lemon’s book, and I wish many more members of FFBC would summon the courage to join the local NAACP chapter!

Morality is the space between what's right and what you can rationalize.
