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First Friday News & Views

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TIME FOR SOME GOOD OLE' FASHIONED DISCRIMINATION

By Jonathan Wilson

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Before there were employment protections written into Iowa law to guard against discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, I advocated the initiation of a Fire-a-Straight Day. The idea, which never really caught on, was that on the designated day gay employers would terminate the employment of a straight staff member for no other reason than that. I, for example, have a terrific secretary who has been with me and supportive for many years and throughout my coming out. She has also been indispensable to the success of the First Friday Breakfast Club. Her capabilities, loyalty, and support could not be questioned. That was the whole point. If fired admittedly because she is straight would bring home graphically the lack of legal recourse for such an injustice. The objective was to call to people's attention the fact that there are both gay and straight employees and employers and the needed protection would protect everyone. The idea never caught on because it relied upon an obvious injustice -- and we live in Iowa where most folks are pretty fair-minded. Hurting the innocent to express homophobia or to make a point would be equally anathema.

That said, I recently received a solicitation from my insurance agent asking that I renew my various insurance policies. I have LOTS of insurance. Auto. Property on multiple properties. Public Liability. Umbrella. You name it and I've got it. I was confident he'd like to retain my business.

Emboldened by the aging process, I found myself reminded of an old hymn that says that for each of us there comes a moment to decide between right and wrong, between the good and the evil side -- to take a principled stand. So I called my insurance agent and told him I'd received the solicitation and that I was at a decision-point in my life. I'd decided to give preference in my business dealings to those who support gay marriage; that seemed emblematic of all things gay supportive. I figured that if he were supportive of equal access to marriage I could be fairly confident he was supportive on other pro-equality issues without being asked. I told him I wouldn't necessarily drop my insurance through him, but I would *for sure* shop my insurance portfolio with others. If I had his assurance on the marriage question, I wouldn't feel any need to go shopping.

There was a pregnant pause, as you might imagine. He said he'd never been asked such a question in his business dealings. I said that he'd never be able honestly to say that again.

He then added, in the hope that it would placate me, that he does not discriminate against customers based upon their sexual orientation, nor do the companies he represents. That was good, as far as it went. It didn't go far enough. From years of conducting depositions I have gained some skills in both asking precise questions and then listening carefully for truly responsive answers. I pointed out to him that his wasn't. I was not particularly surprised about his willingness to take money from anyone, regardless of sexual orientation. Also I was not particularly impressed by it either. I wanted to know specifically about gay marriage.

There was another pregnant pause. It was then that I realized that *my* life decision-point was being shared with him. He had a choice to make also. He similarly had to choose between right and wrong, between good and evil. And he chose to do the right thing (whatever the motive).

CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, June 7, 2013, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by June 5th to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

Discrimination... (cont.)

He said unequivocally that he is in favor of equal access to marriage. Thus satisfied, I reviewed with him my coverages and renewed the portfolio. I have since that incident repeated it several times with others and with similar outcomes.

The idea is not unique to me. I read an article recently about the potential that Rush Limbaugh may soon be parting company with the Cumulus Radio network. A high-ranking Cumulus Radio official was quoted as saying that 48 of the top 50 network advertisers have 'excluded Rush and Hannity' orders. "Every major national ad agency has the same dictate."

The point to be taken is that my exercise of my buying power, if replicated by enough others, could have a cumulative impact and without doing a serious injustice like a Fire-a-Straight Day directed drone -like against the innocent. The fact is that any one advertising purchaser would not impact Cumulus Radio's commitment to Rush Limbaugh. But when the number gets to 48 of the top 50 advertisers, a decision has to be made and folks find motivation to choose the right thing. The end result is the same whether someone chooses to do the right thing for a mercenary motive or with a genuine attitude of altruism.

Are you at a decision-point yet?

Sean Faircloth

By Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday, May 3, was Sean Faircloth, author of **Attack of the Theocrats! How the Religious Right Harms Us All -- and What We Can Do About It**, published last year. Faircloth is an attorney, a former legislator (Maine, 2002-2008), and an advocate for maintaining the separation of church and state.

In 2009 Faircloth became executive director of the Secular Coalition for America, to promote acceptance of nontheistic viewpoints in American life; and in September 2011 he became the Director of Strategy and Policy for the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. His goal with us was to announce a political initiative called "Get Religion Out of Government" that will offer a focus for progressive action in the 2016 elections, and to develop support for its first event, which will feature Richard Dawkins. Faircloth hopes that the initiative can be professionally staffed in Iowa by early 2015.

(The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science <richarddawkinsfoundation.org> is a non-profit organization founded in 2006. Professor Dawkins, a British biologist, [atheist](#), and a vice president of the [British Humanist Association](#), is well known for his criticism of [creationism](#) and "[intelligent design](#)".) Faircloth advocates and speaks around the United States regarding secular public policy and the harm that can come to average citizens if the secular nature of the

"A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies." ML King, Jr.

American Constitution is not followed.

Sean Faircloth is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and the University of California, Hastings College of the Law. As he told us, he is sick and tired of the religious right's "Lording it" over the rest of us in matters of public policy.

How Far Out

By Bruce McCabe

How *far* "out" is far enough?
I've already told my mother.
Telling her was not too rough,
but do I need to tell my stupid brother?
What would the blond at the office say?
She has brought me cookies twice.
If I blurted out "*My dear, I'm gay*"
Will she still think I'm nice?
Do I need to tell my barber,
who asks "*How About Them Hawks?*"
What gay-hatred might he harbor,
razor-cutting off my locks?
It was cool how grandma took it,
But I don't think grandpa wants to know.
My Republican dad would have a fit,
and take it as a personal blow.
Maybe I should disclose to Paul.
We were college buds.
Our discussion topics included all,
over many mugs of suds.
Would his friendship be "*fair weather*,"
If I waved my rainbow flag?
If he saw me dressed in leather?
Or knew some of my friends wore drag?
Should I tell my stern-faced boss?
(The company policy proclaims "*diverse*")
Could being honest cause job loss?
Is the masquerading worse?
I pondered telling Preacher Russ,
After Easter Service.
But how he reads Leviticus
makes me kind of nervous.
Throwing the closet door wide
is what I want to do.
No one wants to hide,
or limit the truth to a few.
God, I think that I'm okay,
with faith, on bended knee,
telling You that I am gay,
and thanking You for making me.

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man."- George Bernard Shaw

From the Pastor's Pen

The Foundation of Sexual Ethics

By Rev. Jonathan Page

The line for the bar stretched down the block. Usually, I am not one for long lines at bars, but this was my first Guerrilla Queer Bar in Boston and everyone in the line was gay. The concept is simple. You put together a Facebook group and then once per month send out a message that the gays are taking over a straight bar for the night. In Boston, it worked surprisingly well.

Standing next to me in line was a drag queen or, more accurately, a drag nun. She wore a black habit with a nun's hat and painted her face white with expressive lipstick and eyeliner. Naturally, I introduced myself and inquired, "So, if you don't mind me asking, what's with the nun outfit?" She proceeded to flip open her Japanese paper fan and cool herself down before responding, "I am a nun in the order of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence." From within her sleeve she produced a business card, which stated as much in colorful writing. Hmm, must be true, I thought. Later I went home and googled the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. As a student of religion, I figured it was important research.

It turns out that the order was founded by an Iowan although, sadly, he was a Hawkeye and not a Cyclone. He had found some old nun's habits from a convent in Cedar Rapids and brought them with him to San Francisco. On Easter 1979, this Iowan, Ken Bunch, convinced two of his friends to don the habits and "terrorize" the streets of the Castro "to promulgate universal joy and expiate stigmatic guilt." Talk about creative: the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a protest against gay sexual repression in the Catholic Church, and in the Christian Church more broadly, complete with its own religious elements.

As a gay Christian, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence prompted some deep thought. For me the heart of the conflict between gay culture and Christianity has never been about the seven biblical passages that supposedly condemn homosexuality. The issue with being a Christian and gay is about desire, and sexual desire in particular, because here is where we run into a problem. A gay identity is fundamentally about sexuality and the expression of that sexuality, whether physically or not. You cannot have a liberated gay sexual identity without desire, and the early church was deeply suspicious of sexual desire, both gay and straight.

From the best we can tell, Jesus was a celibate man and apparently encouraged others to live in a similar manner (Matthew 19:12). The apostle Paul, also celibate, explicitly advocated celibacy and urged people to get married only as a protection against excessive desire (1 Corinthians 7). Presumably in marriage your desire would be extinguished, which is not a strong endorsement of sex in marriage! According to Wayne Meeks, in his famous study of ancient Christian morality, the early church held quite conventional views on virtues and vices but placed disproportionate emphasis on sex. In the fourth century the Jovinian controversy led Jerome and other Church Fathers to argue that sex was only permissible for procreation, even within marriage. Around the same time Augustine of Hip-

po claimed that original sin was passed down because of the inherent sinfulness of the sexual act. After all, at the moment of orgasm you are not usually thinking about God, not counting those who like to scream, "O God!" I don't think Augustine was considering that.

I find it oddly ironic today that conservative Christians insist that heterosexual marriage is the historical biblical ideal. It isn't. Others argue that it was Greek philosophy that led to Christian prudishness about sex. The supposedly "original" Jewish Christianity was not so prudish. While there is some truth to that, Christianity did become more ascetic in the first few centuries, it is often overstated to sanction Christian sexual desire today. It is important for everyone to engage honestly with the role of sexual desire in our lives. Sex is an incredibly strong motivator. For Christians, any contemporary engagement with sexual desire must begin with the admission that Protestant Christians today, of all stripes, do not uphold the same notions of desire as the earliest church. Factors other than "what Paul believed" determine Christian ethical reasoning around sex and desire. Only when we can admit that fact can we begin to explore the actual grounds for our sexual ethics in a gay or straight context. I give the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence credit. They know what they believe and why. Can Christians say the same thing? Next month I will offer some of my own views.

FFBC member Jonathan Page is senior pastor of the Ames United Church of Christ, 217 6th Street, Ames, Iowa. Sunday service at 10:45. He can be reached at jon@Amesucc.org.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the June 7 meeting no later than June 5. Email JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Jason Glass, Director of the Iowa Department of Education. The FFBC scholarship recipients and their families will also be honored at this meeting. Scholarship winners are Rebecca Barrett, Lilly Clark, Gabriella Daft, Christopher Krebill, Nadia Loeppke, Charlotte Mann, Tanner Mote, Josie Mumm, Chris Reising, and Jade Riley.

Thanks to Matt McCoy for his introduction of our May speaker, Sean Faircloth of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science.

Mark your calendar for the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus Pride concert, THE BIG GAY SING, Saturday June 8 at 7:30pm at Drake University's Sheslow Auditorium, 2507 University Ave., Des Moines. Tickets and info at dmgmc.org.

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

FFBC

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Des Moines, Iowa*

JUNE 2013

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My M.O. (Monthly Observations)

“She Ain’t Down Yet”

By Steve Person

At age 81, film star Debbie Reynolds released her memoir entitled **Unsinkable**, a reference to her Academy-Award-nominated role in **The Unsinkable Molly Brown** in 1964. The book, co-written with Dorian Hannaway, is published by William Morrow, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers. Like so many of Debbie Reynolds’s easy-to-watch movies, the book is an easy-to-read and fascinating glimpse into the life of the twentieth century’s quintessential “American Sweetheart.”

The first time I remember seeing Debbie Reynolds on the big screen was 1957’s **Tammy and the Bachelor**. I would have been an eight-year-old kid, but that film made a huge impression on me. I saw it again a few years ago on Turner Classic Movies and was impressed with how well the film held up over time. In the book, Reynolds told how difficult her leading man, Leslie Nielsen, was to work with because he was a “method” actor, and she wasn’t. She also recounted how Walter Brennan, who played her father, was one of film’s great scene stealers and taught her a great deal about cinema acting.

One of my favorite films, as well as Reynolds’s favorites, is **The Unsinkable Molly Brown**. In the book, she explains how much she wanted the part after seeing Tammy Grimes’s Tony-Award-winning Broadway performance. MGM signed Shirley MacLaine to play the role in the film version. MacLaine ultimately had to decline the part because she was under contract to Fox, and Hal Wallis would not release her. Debbie offered to do the part for nothing because she wanted it so badly but was told she was “too short” for the part. Says Reynolds, “This absurd statement reminded me of a story I’d heard about Helen Hayes being flattered by producers, then told she was too short to play Queen Victoria in **Victoria Regina**. Hayes countered with the question, ‘How short is the part?’ and was hired.”

The actress goes into great detail regarding her three failed marriages, the most famous being the furor created by her first husband, Eddie Fisher, running off with Debbie’s good friend, Elizabeth Taylor. The two ladies reconciled years later after Taylor left Fisher to marry actor Richard Burton. Reynolds’s last two husbands, both of whom were wealthy, not only went through their own fortunes but hers, as well.

Fortunately, Reynolds had the good sense to purchase many of the costumes and props that went on public sale when the old studios sold off their inventories in the early 1970s to raise needed cash. After numerous attempts to establish the Hollywood Motion Picture Museum failed, with her collection of vintage costumes and props as the centerpiece, Reynolds finally sold the items at auction on June 18, 2011. Judy Garland’s **Wizard of Oz** dress and ruby slippers brought in \$1,420,000. Audrey Hepburn’s Ascot costume from **My Fair Lady** fetched \$3,800,000. Marilyn Monroe’s famous white pleated dress from **The Seven Year Itch** sold for \$5,520,000—a record for any Hollywood movie costume.

The sale allowed Reynolds to pay off her debts from her failed Las Vegas hotel and provide her with a healthy retirement nest egg although she continues to work when called to do so. All told, the book is a good read. I recommend it!

Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.” -John F. Kennedy.