



First Friday News & Views

April, 2015

Volume 20

Issue 4

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

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Into Fashion
(Register Version)
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▼ The next FFBC Meeting is 7:00am,
Friday, April 3, 2015, at Hoyt
Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland,
Des Moines, IA

▼ RSVP by April 1 to
JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com,
or phone 515-288-2500

When Knuckle Dragging Came Back Into Fashion

By Jonathan Wilson

Around the world we are engaged in a debate over the pros and cons of government-sanctioned torture. Most recently the debate has been renewed by Rudy Giuliani who claims Obama's opposition to torture "undermines" our security, as well as Republican Presidential hopeful Ben Carson (who won the recent poll of Polk County Republicans) when he said that in war there should be no rules. Sadly, this debate has been fueled by a Senate-released report documenting incredible conduct committed by the United States of America and not some despotic, terrorist regime.

Think back to a time before the advent of the New Testament when Jesus announced that the guiding moral principle for human interactions is to turn the other cheek. That was a civilizing improvement over the former guiding principle of an eye-for-an-eye enunciated in the Biblical Old Testament and elsewhere.

The Old Testament principle was itself a civilizing improvement over the prior principle that countenanced utterly disproportional response to any injury caused by another person. Proportionality is more civilized than disproportionality.

If you think back even further to early cavemen, even dis-proportional response was a civilizing improvement for a culture that embraced unprovoked aggression and violence.

Those dragging their knuckles out of a cave held to the view that "might makes right" and that "the ends justify the means." Over the course of thousands of generations of humankind, those principles have been debated and tested. They've been found to be wanting. They've been found to be utterly wrong. They've been found to be uncivilized. Might does not make right. The ends do not justify the means. It is an affront to civilization itself to claim otherwise.

Enter then the current debate over the revelations of misconduct by the CIA. Not only uncivilized, but actually illegal under both United States and international law. War crimes and crimes against humanity. Things dealt with in places like The Hague.

Some have tried to obfuscate the issue by suggesting that, while "torture" is unlawful, "enhanced interrogation techniques" are in a different -- acceptable -- category. Lipstick on a pig. Obviously, they (read: Bush, Cheney, and others in that administration) want to avoid the "torture" label because they know that torture is a crime. They would have us believe that it's difficult to discern what is and isn't torture such that one can justifiably rely for cover upon a tortured memo written by a prostituted lawyer in the Justice Department. They are wrong and we should not be fooled by the obfuscation. The person in the street knows full-well when something is torture. Here's the easy litmus test: if it were done to your captive son or daughter, would you consider it torture? It's as simple as that, and you'd be right.

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Others have tried to “contextualize” the conduct in order to justify it. We’ve heard from folks who were involved first-hand, conjuring up images that remain all too vivid of the attacks on 9/11/01 and the fear that followed. They claim that the legality, if not the morality, of what was done must be viewed “in context.” If context mattered in such things, there’d be no such thing as a war crime or a crime against humanity. War is war; killing happens in war and is justified. Still, *civilized* countries recognize that even in the “context” of war, some behavior is unjustified and, accordingly, a crime. Here’s the simple test: if someone has been taken captive and is under your control, it is a crime to torture them even though moments before they were trying to kill you and, if freed, would try again. In short, what you do unto others is likely to be done unto you or yours. If we are not to be held accountable, it’s more difficult to hold others accountable without embracing unmitigated hypocrisy.

Some have tried to introduce a red herring to the debate, claiming that the enhanced interrogation techniques saved lives by extracting valuable information. For starters, it has not been established conclusively whether torture produced valuable intelligence not otherwise available. More importantly, it doesn’t matter, which is why it’s a red herring: get folks debating that issue and they’re distracted from focusing on the crime that’s been committed. Making the argument is a classic claim that the ends justify the means. Since civilization rejects that misguided notion, whether or not valuable intelligence was gained becomes irrelevant in determining morality and legality.

Included in the US Army basic training was the fact that subordinates are not supposed to obey an illegal order. Being ordered to commit a war crime or a crime against humanity is illegal. Admittedly, disobeying an order, even though it’s illegal, is fraught with peril. Get it wrong and punishment will follow. But that’s what *civilization* is all about. It’s more difficult than the law of the jungle. It’s more challenging than the triumph of brute force. It’s been more demanding of us as civilized human beings since we stopped dragging our knuckles out of a cave.

The lame attempts to justify the conduct are a heightened embarrassment beyond that of the conduct itself. I say, if Bush, Cheney, and others are so confident that they are right in what they admittedly authorized and did, let them make their

case before The Hague. If they’re right, they’ll be vindicated.

If they’re unwilling to do that, I’d suggest that they limit their international travel.

Ponder This

When companies ship Styrofoam, what do they pack it in?

Why do they bother sterilizing needles used for lethal injections?

*Alternate meanings for common words from The Washington Post: **Coffee**, the person upon whom one coughs; **Flabbergasted**, appalled by discovering how much weight one has gained; **Abdicate**, to give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach; and **Esplanade**, to attempt an explanation while drunk.*

If you’re reading this, you’re alive; make the most of it. J.

I went to a bookstore and asked the saleswoman, “Where’s the self-help section? She said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.

Briefs & Shorts

Be sure to RSVP for the April 3 meeting no later than April 1. Contact Jonathan at 288-2500 or email him at JonathanWilson@DavisBrownLaw.com. Our scheduled speaker will be Bill LaHay, Co-Director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP).

Thanks to Allen Vander Linden for his introduction of our March speaker, Dr. Richard Deming, founder of ABOVE + BEYOND CANCER.



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.

Plan to attend the reception at the World Food Prize venue from 6-9:00 p.m. on April 24. No charge. Reservations required. Contact Beau Fodor 515-546-6230 or beaufodor@yahoo.com.

The following is a continuation of a series of reflections by FFBC members.

My Story...

By Tim Schreck

When I was presented with the opportunity to write my reflections for the FFBC newsletter, I was honored and a little bewildered. My “history” feels like a story anyone could have experienced...some struggles, searching for self, and taking on a few adventures along the way. Then the feelings connected to those memories clicked, and I realized I too had a story to tell.

I grew up on a farm in Carroll County in western Iowa, just outside the little town of Dedham (known world-wide for its amazing 100-year old secret-recipe-ring-baloney!). Number 6 in a family of 12 children, from a very early age I remember feeling like the outsider, or maybe the outlier. I was an alter boy at church, sang in choir, did all the school musicals, had lovely friendships and great memories. I remember being called a faggot to my face two times in high school...moments etched in my memory; it still hurts to think about it. I’m sure it happened more than twice.

Off to college as a straight man to discover the joys of drinking -- a lot! (Like, blacked out driving home “I’m not gay but I wish that hot football player was my cowboy friend” kind of drinking). Yearning for my roommates, and waiting for my friend to come out as “bisexual” so that I could join him in defiant brotherhood! I dated women occasionally, always ending it when they started liking me too much. (*Nothing seems to please women more than a closeted gay man. Ed.*) I believe it was winter 1987 when a female friend asked me if I ever saw the two of us getting married, and I FINALLY said, “No, because I think I’m gay.”

But 27 years of repression and sealed exit lanes are hard to overcome. It took a couple more years of living in “Confusion,” Minnesota, starting to meet gay friends, hiding from straight friends, and wondering, like my father, if this were a phase. In 1990, I took a leap of faith and moved to New York City to live with one of those “pined-for” college roommates. From day one, I felt at home living in Manhattan, playing gay volleyball, singing at gay

church, marching in the gay parade, dancing at gay all night parties (okay, I only did that twice, and was a wreck for a week each time!)

Landing in New York in 1990, mid-AIDS devastation, added as much confusion as clarity about my life. I experienced dozens of men my age and younger, leaving us way too soon and too horribly. I met some of the pioneer AIDS activists, learned history behind the Stonewall riots, held dying men in my arms, sang at their memorials. I was forced to face new sexual experiences honestly, often fearfully, and to come out not only as a gay man, but also as a person under attack by known and unknowable villains. I also spent summer weekends on Fire Island, became somewhat versed at my favorite spots in Manhattan, and created my own village. In short, I became a person who believed that being gay is fine, dare I say fabulous, and became more confident in my own skin.

I moved from NYC to the Bay Area in 1996, and lived in San Francisco until 2012. It was there that I lived as a “semi-professional” gay man and experienced joys and accomplishments I will carry forever. Great friends, life-changing experiences (mostly related to AIDS fundraising), career-altering decisions, and exposure to so many worlds I never would have known had I not taken those serial leaps of faith.

And now I am back in Iowa. 30 years ago, I left my home and family because I saw no possibility of living a secure, happy life here as a gay person. I have been in Des Moines almost a year, and it’s been an absolute revelation to love my family even more, to discover FFBC, and to join a thriving, vibrant gay community that knows itself, understands its history and embraces its calling to share the message of love and acceptance.

So, my lessons learned from my journey...

- leaps of faith are exciting and scary, and generally turn out quite well
- open your eyes to find the right people in the right place at the right time
- being gay is just one tiny part of the package...there’s a LOT going on inside!
- Dorothy was right – there’s no place like home.



BIPARTISAN SENATE SUPPORTS ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The state of Iowa needs to do more -- not less -- to ensure that all Iowans have access to mental health services.

Iowa law currently requires the state to maintain and operate four mental health institutes (MHIs) in Cherokee, Clarinda, Independence and Mount Pleasant. The facilities are located in four regions so that Iowans in need of acute mental health services don't have to travel hours for help, and family and friends are better able to support their loved ones.

The Legislature appropriated sufficient funds to operate all four facilities during this current fiscal year and Governor Branstad approved the appropriations. That means the Department of Human Services (DHS) must administer the facilities to the best of its ability and in good faith.

The Governor's unilateral decision to close the MHIs in Clarinda and Mount Pleasant undermines the state's efforts to provide Iowans with critical services. Before the Legislature has even had a chance to weigh in on this issue, layoff notices have been sent to workers at Mount Pleasant, and both facilities have stopped accepting new patients.

The Senate approved two bipartisan bills to address this situation. The Senate passed [SF 333](#), which requires the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) to admit eligible Iowans to the MHIs through the current fiscal year that ends June 30.

The Senate also approved [SF 402](#), which sets up a process for DHS to develop and implement crucial community based mental health services. Services outlined in the plan and approved by the Legislature must be in place before we consider closing the MHIs. The plan must include input from stakeholders and experts, ensure that transitional services are offered without hurting quality of care, ensure local access to highly trained community and institutionally based care providers, and identify stable funding for new services.

The Senate also is expected to approve several other bills to strengthen Iowa's statewide mental health system this session.

Additional information

This is a legislative update from Senator Matt McCoy, representing west part of Des Moines, portions of West Des Moines and Cumming in northwest Warren County. For newsletters, photos and further information, go to www.senate.iowa.gov/senator/mccoy.

To contact Senator McCoy during the week, call the Senate Switchboard at 515-281-3371. Otherwise he can be reached at home at 515-274-0561. E-mail him at matt.mccoy@legis.iowa.gov.



Climbing to a Life More Fully Lived

By Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday, March 6 was Dr. Richard L. Deming, M.D., a Des Moines radiation oncologist who is the author of the program “Above + Beyond Cancer.” The core of his appearance before the FFBC was a startlingly beautiful slide show of his “Cancer Survivors Trek to Everest” in 2010, when he flew 14 cancer survivors and a team of their care-givers to Nepal for a 13-day trek to the Everest Base Camp.

No précis could possibly indicate the power of Dr. Deming’s story – which would be incredible but for the pictures and for the urgency of his presentation. The scenery was amazing, and the stories of the individual climbers even more amazing. As one of our members wrote: “I wish you all could have been there to listen to the doctor’s words of hope and the ‘lessons of life’ he has

learned through his journey. There were tears in our eyes -- tears of liberation, hope, compassion, and learning. If you ever have an opportunity to hear Dr. Deming speak, do not miss it.”

Richard described his own first “bucket-list” Nepalese trek in 2000, which turned out to be a very different – mountain-top! – experience in which he discovered what his own life needed to become: “That trip was the fulfillment of a personal dream. But this trip felt more like giving birth to 14 dreams. On our journey, we experienced some hardships along the way. However, the adversity we encountered led us to new heights of personal growth. This adventure mirrored and reinforced the journey already completed by cancer survivors. Laughter and tears along the way deepened our understanding of how adversity can enhance our lives. We returned to Iowa with an even greater appreciation for life, our planet, and our fellow human beings. We are certain that our enhanced sense of gratitude and generosity will help change the world we live in for the better.”

Richard Deming earned his academic degrees at South Dakota State University and Creighton University. He has made a life-long commitment of giving back to causes near and dear to him. He has devoted years to generating support for the YMCA Partners with Youth, Everybody Wins Iowa, Mercy Children’s Center, the Variety Club, Des Moines Public Library, South Dakota State University, and an endless list of projects committed to cancer survivorship. He supports many organizations including Mercy Cancer Center, American Cancer Society, Livestrong, Hospice of Central Iowa, Komen Race for the Cure, Leukemia and Lymphoma Foundation, Mercy Hospice, and Bras for the Cause; and he has played a key role in securing funding and gifts for these causes. Deming also serves as a board member of the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, where he has created a Cultivating Compassion Fund to support initiatives that encourage civility and compassion. He can be reached at Mercy Cancer Center Radiation Oncology, 411 Laurel Street Suite C100, (515)344-3699.

TRUE/FALSE 2015

By Gary Kaufman

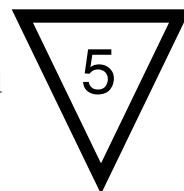
I have just returned from the True/False Film Festival, an annual 4-day documentary film festival in Columbia, Missouri. For the first time I was able to experience the full breadth of the festival from the Jubilee masquerade gala party on Thursday night to the Toasted talk show at 1 AM Monday morning.

The opening night we were greeted at the luxurious Missouri Theater by Missouri Governor Jay Dixon and his wife, Georganne, who were just back from the first American agricultural trade mission to Cuba in over a quarter century. The opening movie was presented by Academy Award® winning director Morgan Neville as he introduced the world premiere of his latest film, **Best of Enemies**; a documentary of the Gore Vidal/William F. Buckley debate in 1968. Later that night I saw **Drones**, which was a revealing look at some of the unintended consequences of the U.S., introducing drone warfare to the world.

Other highlights of the festival were **Bitter Lake**, a look at Afghanistan on its place in modern history; **Going Clean**, an expose of Scientology (which will be shown on HBO next month); **Invasion**, a retelling of the U.S. invasion of Panama from the viewpoint of those who experienced it; **Kurt Cobain: Montage of Heck**, a very intensive look at Kurt Cobain with a dynamite soundtrack; and **How To Change The World**, a detailed took at the origin of Greenpeace.

On the lighter side there was **Tea Time**, a visit to several multi-year tea parties of Chilean ladies who had been meeting on an appointed day for tea for 60 years. These ladies do not hold back from each other and generally say what they think of the world around them and of each other. One of the old ladies was even in the audience with us!

If you like documentaries, I strongly urge you to attend some time. Each movie is presented by the director or others in the documentary who respond to questions from the audience.



FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views*

Des Moines, Iowa

April, 2015

*First Friday
Breakfast Club*

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MADE ON A  MAC

MY M.O. (MONTHLY OBSERVATIONS)

A Book Review of Dan Brown's Inferno by Steve Person

I am not much of a reader of novels preferring instead biographies or histories. I find actual human beings to be much more fascinating than fictional characters. Still, I do enjoy, on occasion, a good mystery/thriller if it is well written.

Inferno opens in Florence where hero Robert Langdon (also of **The Da Vinci Code** and **Angels and Demons**), finds himself in an Italian hospital recovering from what is told to him a bout of amnesia caused by a grazing gunshot wound to his skull. He has no memory of traveling to Italy or why, indeed, he is there.

Dante's epic poem, "Inferno," plays a major role in the story with its graphic depiction of the various stages of Hell and those who inhabit it. The Malthusian Theory of overpopulation leading to mankind's destruction is the other leading dynamic in this story that has a surprise ending.

Langdon barely escapes his hospital room with the help of an English female doctor named Sienna. Their progress through the streets of Florence and later the canals of Venice made for especially interested reading for me because I visited so many of the sites from which they barely escape. From the sumptuous Pitti Palace across the Arno to the Accademia Gallery, The Uffizi Gallery, and the Opera del Duomo Museum in Florence and on to St. Mark's and the Doge's Palace in Venice, Brown relates a tale of a manic yet sickly gifted scientist out to reduce the earth's burgeoning population.

Using the coincidences that fit so conveniently in novels, the hero Langdon, a world-renowned symbolologist, is able to keep one step ahead of the sinister forces who are chasing him and Sienna. His fame as a well-respected Harvard professor allows him to incorporate other minor characters in the story to assist him in what otherwise would be unthinkable actions on those characters' parts.

From Venice, the action jumps to Istanbul where the search for the formula that is bound to doom mankind is thought to be hidden in the lower recesses of Hagia Sophia built in A.D. 360. The frenetic final chapters lead to what I believe is a rather unusual ending for a Dan Brown novel. I liked it.

The book's publication date is 2013, and though it may not be eligible in bookstores, I checked with the Des Moines Public Library, and multiple copies are available there. If you liked the earlier works of Dan Brown, I think you will like this one, too.