



First Friday News & Views

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Issue 1

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

Refilling the Swamp

By Jonathan Wilson

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▼ The next FFBC Meeting is 7:00am,
Friday, January 6, 2016, at Hoyt
Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland,
Des Moines, IA

▼ RSVP by January 4 to
JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com,

Donald Trump promised during his campaign, repeatedly, that he would “never embarrass you.” Before even the inauguration, he’s already broken that promise, at least as far as I’m concerned. I have a fairly low threshold for embarrassment. If, as president-elect of the United States, you don’t have your act together, I’m embarrassed. Perhaps his promise was directed to his supporters. If so, he may be right. He knows his supporters better than I do – or even aspire to do. He may know that they’re nearly incapable of being embarrassed or knowing when they should be. Welcome to amateur hour that promises to last at least four years – four long years.

The tweeting needs to stop; at least it needs to stop as far as discerning, serious, public policy advocates are concerned. There is almost no real problem in today’s world that should, both, be of concern to the President of the United States and that can be addressed in 140 characters or less. Not possible. Problems of consequence today are too nuanced, complex, and interwoven for such simplistic solutions. Answers expressed in 140 characters or less inevitably present an open invitation to unintended, negative consequences.

Unconstrained by any detailed public policy objectives beyond making America great (white) again, Trump’s cabinet picks have been less than impressive. Dr. Ben Carson as head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development; you have got to be kidding me. By his own admission, Carson is not capable of overseeing HUD. But, there he is, poised to take on that considerable responsibility. His saving grace may be that Trump lacks the discernment born of experience to know whether or not Carson’s doing a good job. The professionals in that department have to be cringing, at the very least. I predict some resignations among those HUD professionals who are cursed with both knowledge and integrity.

In the closing days of the campaign there were repeated, full-page ads promising that Trump was going to “drain the swamp” in Washington D.C. So far, his approach to achieving that objective is to repopulate the swamp with establishment types. Here I’m thinking of designees like Elaine Chao for Secretary of Transportation. She served as Secretary of Labor in the George W. Bush administration and is the spouse (sympathies directed to her are in order) of none other than “Mr. Establishment” Mitch McConnell. They’ve been

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married since 1993, so she's a woman of long suffering; I figure she sees him as her ticket to heaven.

Several of the remaining appointees or prospective appointees fall into the category of has-been-wannabes. Here I'm thinking of Chris ("Bridgegate") Christie (who's been offered multiple positions but, to his frustration, not the position of Attorney General that he wanted), Newt (I've had as many failed marriages as the president-elect) Gingrich, Rudy (I've had as many failed marriages as the president-elect, including one to my cousin) Giuliani, retired Lt. General Michael (I love an unsupported conspiracy theory and fake news) Flynn, Steve (white supremacy advocate) Gannon, Rick ("Oops") Perry, and General (retired-in-dishonor) David (I've never heard a secret I could keep) Patraeus. I'm also thinking of Rex (Russian Order of Friendship) Tillerson. I don't see that cast of characters, and their ilk, offering a credible path to greatness. No way; no how.

Learning To Be Gay?

By Jordan Duesenberg

Last time I was in New York City I came across a book called **How To Be Gay** by David M. Halperin. At first glance I thought the title was absurd. I mean, there's really no one way to be gay, just like there's really no one way to be straight, right? But then I thought about when I first came out and how all I wanted was someone simply to answer that very question for me (beyond the obvious of loving/sleeping with/being attracted to other men). I bought the book.

I'm not going to go into the specifics of the book. If you have the time, however, it's an interesting read (although somewhat dated in my opinion) that essentially makes the argument that, although those of us in the LGBT community are born homosexual, we still have to learn how to be a part of gay culture.

Until I came out in my early twenties, I had spent my energy trying to convince myself and others that I was straight by acting how I thought straight men were supposed to act. Truth be told, this was exhausting, but there was no confusion on how I was supposed to act or what was socially acceptable as a straight

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Briefs & Shorts

Be sure to RSVP by January 4 for the January 6, 2016, meeting by calling 515-288-2500, or on line at: JonathanWilson@DavisBrownLaw.com. Our speaker on January 6 will be Bill Moulder, the former chief of the Des Moines Police Force. You may want to invite some of your friends to attend!!

Thanks to John Schmacker for introducing our December speaker, Mel Duncan, co-founder of the international Nonviolent Peaceforce.

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. Thanks for Steve Person for going out of his way to help get out the last issue of our newsletter.

Consider a tax deductible contribution to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax exempt testamentary gift, or both. We're all going to die, and we can't take it with us. Contact Jonathan Wilson for details.

More Ponderables By Jonathan Wilson:

If President Trump proceeds with making Muslims register, as is rumored, sign me up.

President-elect Trump proves that money and class are separable.

President-elect Trump was born on third base, believed he'd hit a triple, and told everyone it was a homerun.

Trump is proud that he won the most counties in the Presidential election; losers have to grasp at something they have won. Trump got fewer votes but won more square miles. Isn't he special?!

Response to A Millennial Perspective

By Mike Sterk

As a new member of FFBC and receiving the newsletter for the first time, I was struck by the insightful piece by Jordan Duesenberg expressing a Millennial perspective on the LGBT movement toward equality and the future role of Millennials. I felt admiration and pride for his willingness to speak out so eloquently and confront issues some in our community have with Millennials.

His article pretty much hit the bull's eye dead center. He thought through his article, expressing truth with great wisdom, authority, and leadership in a non-defensive way. His attention to facts and details was quite amazing. His way of expressing his view and opinion were right on point.

How can some in our community blame Millennials for a situation they did not create? Many

of those among us who blame them are themselves the cause of the problem. How can Millennials be blamed for being born to a generation of parents who were probably the most prosperous and indulgent generation in the history of this nation? And what parents who have the financial means to give their kids the finer things in life wouldn't do it? For many, the stressful situations they work in are made bearable by knowing they will be able to give their families a higher standard of living. I'm not a parent, but I am a proud uncle, and it gives me great pleasure to give my nephew nice things for Christmas and his birthday. I love it when I hear of something he wants, and I can surprise him with it. If I go overboard it's my fault, not his.

Let's give Millennials like Jordan an A grade for standing up for something they believe in. Millennials like Jordan aren't on their butts just letting life happen and pass them by with a non-caring

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P o n d e r T h i s

You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make. Jane Goodall

Memo to Uber-Christians: If truth were immutable and unchanging there'd be no New Testament.

Becoming President doesn't change who you are; it magnifies who you are. Barack Obama

Putting others down is the cheap way to feel better about yourself; but it's just a feeling. You're actually no better.

Wisdom is measured by the number of times we've been to a cemetery.

Actuaries can tell you generally when you are likely to die; Italian actuaries can tell you when you're going to die.

Duesenberg, Cont'd from Page 2

male. When I came out, understanding how I was now supposed to act (or watch, listen, read, etc.) to make my life most fulfilling as a gay male became much more difficult, especially after denying myself anything that was remotely deemed gay my entire life to that point. There are plenty of articles online that help you with the coming out process, but there's not really much else that explains where to go after you come out. In fact, I didn't really know anybody gay I could ask for advice.

I'd make my girlfriends go out with me to the bars so I could meet people but, even then, gay men seemed so different at that time in my life, and I felt like a fish out of water. From the way they talked, to what they talked about, to what they wore, to the cool ways they did their hair, to what they drank -- it all seemed so foreign. It was like they were all in a club and all I wanted to do was join. How could I be like them? What were the movies and tv shows I needed to watch to understand their jokes and references? What were the books I was supposed to read to understand gay history & culture (especially when the only books at the bookstore in the LGBT section were romance novels or guides on either coming out or guides for parents on how to accept their gay child)? Where was I supposed to shop? I felt like Lindsay Lohan when she first sits with the Plastics clique in **Mean Girls**. I was desperately wanting someone to tell me, "On Wednesdays we wear pink!"

I'm not saying that all gay men act the same, but I am saying there are definite cultural traits and commonalities that gay men have adopted for themselves that I, as an outsider, had to learn about. I can relate to the author's viewpoints in the book **How To Be Gay**.

Looking back, it was an exciting time, when life suddenly seemed so new and unpredictable. I realize that I had it way easier than most because I had the internet. To immerse yourself in gay culture, however, requires you to do much more than chat with someone on an app or do some Google searches. This article probably makes me sound like I was fake and desperate at that time, but all I really wanted was to connect with those around me who also identified the same as me. I guess there's really no book that can completely answer these questions for any of us. It requires that you actually get out in the world and figure it out along the way.

Yes, Nonviolence Can Work By Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday, December 2, 2016, was Mel Duncan, co-founder of Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP), an international organization which sends unarmed, paid civilian protection forces into conflict areas, to foster dialogue among the conflicting parties and to provide a protective presence for threatened non-combatants.

Duncan's quietly passionate presentation – his basic message was that, with some 34,000 refugees being created *every day* in violent parts of the world, our future is either non-violent or there is no future – produced first an astonished silence and then a flurry of urgent and interested questions from his audience. Duncan vividly described NP activities ranging from entering active conflict zones; to removing civilians in the crossfire; to providing opposing factions a safe space to negotiate. Other activities have included serving as a communication link between warring factions, securing safe temporary housing for civilians displaced by war, providing violence prevention measures during elections, and negotiating the return of kidnapped family members.

Headquartered in Brussels and with an office in the Twin Cities, Nonviolent Peaceforce's field staff include veterans of conflict zones, experienced peacekeepers, and other workers with the right combination of experience, skills, aptitude and attitude. NP is registered in the US as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization; its total expenses in 2014-15 amounted to some \$11.5 million, and tax-deductible donations can be sent to 2610 University Avenue West in St. Paul MN or <www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org>.

"We do not take sides in any conflict, and work independently from any special interest group, political party, ideology, or religion," Duncan said. "We are committed to the dignity, safety, and well-being of all people." He emphasized one over-

arching goal in particular, to develop and promote the theory and practice of unarmed civilian peacekeeping so that it may be adopted as a strategic policy option by decision-makers and public institutions.

Mel Duncan was born (in 1950) and grew up in Davenport, Iowa. A graduate of Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota and the Center for Creation-Centered Spirituality in Oakland, California, he has devoted himself to political/spiritual issues as diverse as peace in Central America; living wages; peace conversion of weapons industries; corporate welfare reform; nonviolent conflict resolution; opposition to nuclear waste storage in environmentally and culturally sensitive areas; and opposition to public financing of a baseball stadium. He served as Executive Director of the Minnesota Jobs with Peace Campaign and the Minnesota Alliance for Progressive Action, and has volunteered for service as a peacekeeper on the border of Nicaragua during the Contra war, delivering medical supplies to Iraq, and working for the election of US Senator Paul Wellstone in 1990.

At the Hague Appeal for Peace in 1999 Duncan met the peace activist David Hartsough, and they began laying the groundwork for an international non-governmental organization to put nonviolent strategies into practice for the prevention and mitigation of violence in conflict zones. Based on Mohandas Gandhi's concept of a Shanti Sena ("peace army," the model involves using trained unarmed civilian peacekeepers who work strategically with local groups to create space for nonviolent conflict resolution. Nonviolent Peaceforce was inaugurated in 2002 with Duncan as Executive Director and has since conducted civilian peacekeeping operations in Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Guatemala, Sudan, and now at Standing Rock, North Dakota.

Mel Duncan and his wife Georgia have eight children and live in St. Paul, Minnesota. You can email him at <mduncan@nonviolentpeaceforce.org>

McCoy elected assistant leader for Senate Democrats

[Des Moines] State Senator Matt McCoy of Des Moines will help lead the Iowa Legislature over the next two years as an Assistant Democratic Leader. McCoy was elected by the other Democratic members of the Iowa Senate during a Statehouse meeting November 19.

"I'm grateful for the support of my fellow legislators, and I look forward to the work ahead," said McCoy. "We must help Iowa families succeed and bring more good jobs to our state. I will support proposals that accomplish those goals."

The 2017 session of the 87th Iowa General Assembly will convene on Monday, January 9, 2017. For more information, contact State Senator Matt McCoy at 515-681-9327.

Never Too Late...to Meet Family for the First Time

John Tompkins

Former FFBC member and continued supporter

Things happened in life that you may have never expected to turn out that way.

I was a child adopted shortly after birth (10 days to be exact) by a couple in Des Moines. It was the summer of 1948 and I had the good fortune of growing up in a good environment, raised by two parents and in the company of one brother. Both adoptive parents are now deceased.

Mother had told me at the age of 9 or 10, that I was "adopted" because she would not be able to have a successful pregnancy due to injuries from a car accident in college. Both parents wanted children after the war, and adoption was the only option. Mom told me that, other than some sketchy health history, she and my father were given very limited, general information about the birth parents.

Iowa legislation passed in 1941 made access to information nearly impossible without very unusual circumstances and a Court order unsealing records. The legislators, in 1941, in their zeal to "protect the adoptive and birth parents" had forgotten about one part of the equation, *the child*. I was always curious about my origins and birth family, but I knew my hands were tied. I even wrote a paper on the subject while studying for my Master's Degree. After sharing that with my adoptive mother, I could tell it was quite emotional for her, so I put on the brakes.

After the demise of my adoptive parents and my move to Phoenix, I first hired an Arizona attorney, who wasn't able to do much without a license to practice law in Iowa. I also hired a Private Investigator in the Des Moines area who claimed he specialized in adoption cases. Other than collecting a retainer from me, he accomplished absolutely nothing over a period of a two years, saying only that he had "lost some of his former contacts in the court system." I also petitioned the Polk County District Court a couple of times regarding my adoption records, receiving in return only a form letter citing the Iowa law. Frustrated, I would have liked to burn a copy of the Iowa Code and return the ashes to Polk County Clerk of Court. The attitudes expressed by the Court and the Iowa Department of Health that maintains adoption records were more hurtful than those of any others I have had contact with

Never Too Late... (cont'd from Col. 1)

over the years on this subject. It would probably please them if adopted adults would simply go away and not disturb them. After all, were they not second class citizens that couldn't possibly ever amount to much anyway?

My partner, now spouse, had encouraged me not to give up and he petitioned the Court asking, as my spouse, whether he could obtain my adoption records. Bingo! In a couple of weeks we inexplicably received a "redacted" copy of the *Pre Adoption Record*. Redactions did appear on page 1. But on page 2, we found some un-redacted, vital information, such as **my birth mother's full name and the names of other children she had delivered**. As it turned out, my birth mother had two children before me, while she was married to her first husband; only one of which was conceived by her and her husband. The second child was 3 days shy of one year older than me, which means that 3 months after he was delivered, she was again pregnant (with me), but by a different man. My birth was considered "legitimate" because my mother was married at the time of my birth. Never mind that the father was not her husband!

The rest of the story fell into place rather neatly. Letters were written to both of the older half-brothers whose addresses were located thanks to the Internet. Both responded to a PO Box reserved for the sake of anonymity. One lives in Downers Grove, Illinois, and the other lived in Nashville, and now lives in Tucson. Neither had any idea of my existence. Later, I found that a daughter was born to our mother in 1952 sired by yet a different man. Shortly after that, mother and her first husband were divorced. She moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, remarried, and had one more child in 1956 by that second husband.

My older half-brother and my spouse were instrumental in establishing communication with the other siblings -- all living -- and we were miraculously able to come together at a rented home in North Scottsdale, Arizona, for a whole week in early October. As we bonded there, many things previously unknown were revealed. We all had the same mother, and we all had different fathers; we were all related to the same degree as half siblings. With only our mother as the common denominator, we could still identify some notable resemblances in both physical features and personality despite being raised in different environments. I bear a particularly strong resemblance to my slightly older half-brother, down even to some mannerisms that we share. As the reunion drew to a close, we vowed to keep in touch as a newly discovered family.

[Tune in next month for the fascinating conclusion about the intriguing mother that these half-siblings share, pieced together bit by bit before, during, and since the family reunion.]

Unimaginable Outcome and Cascading Confusion

By Tyler Coe

When Hillary Rodham Clinton (“HRC”) announced she would run a second time for President of the United States, I immediately felt reenergized. Three years of law school drained politics from my body. I could not find the energy to attend rallies, write letters, engage in political conversations, or even watch the news. Once HRC made the announcement to run, I felt our country could easily move onward. She had the experience, vision, and drive to propel us forward. HRC would protect the rights of women, children, LGBTQ individuals, minorities, et cetera. Plus, as our first female President, HRC is someone I would proudly boast about years down the road to any person who would listen.

As I stood in a conference room with friends and colleagues on election night, I felt immense pride. Pride in the fact my country would elect such an accomplished woman to serve as the first female president. As the night wore on and the results poured in, I could not believe the result. Someone I viewed as the epitome of hope did not win the election. The person I looked at with great admiration did not win the Electoral College tally. I knew HRC had flaws, but to elect an individual so potentially harmful to the rights of countless individuals baffled me.

Now that the election provided us with President-elect Donald J. Trump, I sit in my office thinking about how we move forward. I do not know how to move forward. I never imagined this result. Even if President-elect Trump’s promises never come to fruition, the very idea that some people wish to destroy the rights of women, children, LGBTQ individuals, and minorities, leaves me wondering where we go from here.

Tyler Coe may be reached at tylerleecoe@gmail.com

Kaufman -- Cont'd from p. 6, Col. 2

the roof-top Santa; and the movie also has excellent, excellent writing. In addition, we even get a moral: ***“Your purpose in life is to help others, and if you can’t, at the very least don’t hurt them.”*** Top this off with a piece of home-made-from-scratch sweet potato pie! Yummm!

Seek out this movie; you’ll be happy you did. For those of you who need more convincing try checking out the trailer:

<http://www.almostchristmasmovie.com/trailer>

Almost Christmas Review by Gary Kaufman

Almost Christmas opens with a montage featuring a black couple falling in love; getting married; having children; raising children. It ends with the husband, Danny Glover, sitting on a bed, pensive after the passing of his beloved wife, Grace. This is all in the opening credits. The movie then begins with the arrival of Grace’s family for a five-day stay at the old home in which they all grew up; the gathering concluding on Christmas Day. Now, for me, immersing myself in a 5-day black family gathering for Christmas is about as alien to this white farm boy that I could imagine, but I do share one thing in common with this family – love of a good homemade, made-from-scratch dessert using mother’s recipe! So I took a chance, immersed myself, and was very glad I did. It was a beautifully written movie that is hilarious at times; yet containing many emotional scenes. Some will make you cry and others will make you shed tears of joy.

All the father wants is for the family to act like a loving family for five days. This turns out to be quite a challenge. Two sisters will barely talk to each other, and when they do its not particularly civil. One son is running a campaign for Congress and is made to choose what values he supports. This is while the father is contemplating selling the house that they all love, even though the cooking isn’t all that great now that mother is gone.

Although this review will probably be published after the movie has left town, it is one worth seeking out. There is one scene where a few of the ladies start dancing in momma’s kitchen with more of them joining in as the music quickly changed. One of those ladies is Mo’Nique she is playing the aunt who has made a career of being a backup singer for some of the greatest bands from 60s on. When she takes the dance floor, everyone’s energy is charged. Soon the rest of the ladies join her; then individually the men join in. It is a totally joyous, magical moment to experience. And be sure to sit through the out-take at the end of the feature – the one showing the cutout of the rooftop Santa repair scene is a hoot and it’s great to see some of the creativity shown and playfulness of the cast when making the incredible film.

There are bits of wisdom delivered by the social-media-savvy young children. It has the old first-they-hate-each-other-then-fall-in-love-with-each-other movie formula that always works; contains bits of total hilarity such as when their uncle works fixing

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Response to A Millennial Perspective

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attitude. Rather than ridicule and criticize them, our older generation should help them channel their energy in a very productive way and help them learn how to lead this nation very productively someday? It seems like my nephew has access to an unlimited energy source. When his parents help guide his energy in a productive way, it's amazing how much he can do. Let's face it: those of us older members of the community might have the head knowledge, but we sure don't have their energy. Let's help them achieve their goals in a way that eliminates any lose-lose situation and creates a win-win situation for everyone. Let's help them keep the LGBT rights and privileges that the previous generation fought so hard (and some died) to achieve, and expand upon them. Wouldn't that be the best way to honor those who have gone before them?

My advice to him is this: be an adult-child as long as you can. Adulthood doesn't happen quickly. He and others like him have plenty of years ahead to be strictly an adult. Don't push it. Older people - let's face it, while adulthood has its privileges, it also has its share of times that really

suck. Pushing the Millennials too fast and too hard will only cause them to burn out earlier in life and end up on medications and in counselors' offices. A lot of problems, divorces, mental breakdowns, and so forth could be eliminated if the younger generation weren't pushed so hard to be adults. My parents had me way too young and were not ready for it. Being forced to become an instant adult didn't benefit anyone.

I admire Jordan for his initiative and courage. The Millennials are asking for our help, but not in a way that is familiar to us. So let's learn to listen to them in a new way. After all, the majority of them can whip the crap out of us with their ability to understand and utilize technology. Condemnation has no positive effect, and encouraging them to be all they can be can have only positive outcomes. I would much rather have them full of energy than to be on their butts in a daze. I made my share of mistakes when I was younger; I'm truly thankful for all of the mentors that helped guide me. I don't know where I would be without them. I owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

Thanks, Jordan, for giving all of us older people a wake-up call with your article.

Still Pondering? Try these.

People seem to read the Bible a whole lot more as they get older. What are they doing? Cramming for finals?

Old age is when you still have something on the ball but you are just too tired to bounce it.

Did Adam ever say to Eve, "Watch it! There are plenty more ribs where you came from!"

I drive far too fast to worry about cholesterol.

Why is there only one Monopolies Commission?
Why the sun lightens our hair, but darkens our skin?
Why women can't put on mascara with their mouth closed?

Why don't you ever see the headline

"Psychic Wins Lottery"?

Why is "abbreviated" such a long word?

Why is it that doctors call what they do "practice"?

Why is lemon juice made with artificial flavour, and dishwashing liquid made with real lemons?

Why is the man who invests all your money called a broker?

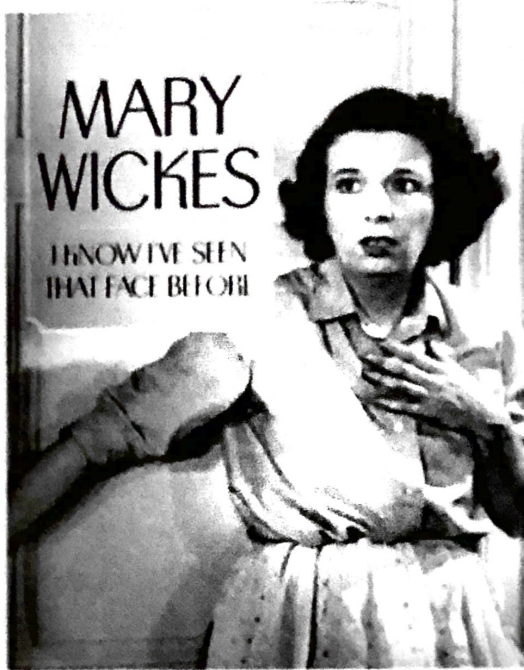
Why is the time of day with the slowest traffic called rush hour?

Why didn't Noah swat those two mosquitoes?

Why do they sterilize the needle for lethal injections?

Why don't sheep shrink when it rains?

Why are they called apartments when they are all stuck together?



STEVE TARAVELLA

Review by Steve Person

In 1942's *Now Voyager*, Bette Davis's character says to Mary Wickes's nurse role, "I suspect you are a treasure," wryly insinuating that Miss Wickes is the only one who can cope with Davis's harridan of a mother brilliantly played by Gladys Cooper. Of course, the writer who penned that line was correct. Mary Wickes was a treasure.

Steve Taravella's comprehensive biography of Mary Wickes traces her beginnings from her roles in the St. Louis Little Theatre to her moves to New York and later Hollywood. Her first film role featured her as Nurse Preen, the role she created on Broadway in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. In the Broadway production, the overbearing Monty Woolley refers to Mary's character as "Miss Bedpan." The film version has Woolley calling her "Miss Stomach Pump," because the Hayes Office felt the word "bedpan" would "offend movie goers' sensibilities." Censorship then as now is a silly and unnecessary insult to the movie, television, and reading public.

Mary Wickes was one of those actors that audiences see frequently but may not remember her name, thus the subtitle to Taravella's book. Among the roles she made famous were the first actress portraying Mary Poppins in a 1949 Studio One television production; Sister Mary Lazarus in 1992's *Sister Act* starring Whoopi Goldberg; and the overbearing ballet instructor in a 1952 *I Love Lucy* episode. Like Margaret Kerry as Tinker Bell (see the December issue of this newsletter), Wickes choreographed all the moves of Cruella De Vil for Disney's animators' 1961 film, *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, although her voice was never used. She was one fascinating and quirky individual.