

**FFBC**

# First Friday News & Views

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

April 2018

Volume 23

Issue 4

The next FFBC meeting is  
Friday, April 6,  
2018  
7:00 a.m.



FFBC Meeting Location:  
Hoyt Sherman Place,  
15<sup>th</sup> and Woodland,  
Des Moines, IA



R.S.V.P.

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or phone

(515) 288-2500

by Wednesday,  
April 4.



FFBC Website:  
[www.ffbciaowa.org](http://www.ffbciaowa.org)



## Gun Violence Can Be Significantly Reduced in Frequency and Magnitude

by Jonathan Wilson

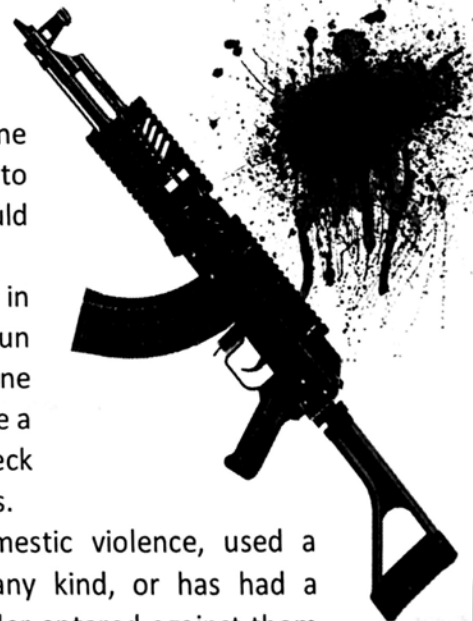
Let's start with the inescapable fact that there isn't one single thing that can be done to stop all gun violence in this country. The argument is made (by those opposed to any regulation of guns) that, absent such a "silver bullet," there's no need to discuss the subject. An equally flawed permutation of that argument is that because whatever is proposed would not have avoided the most recent example of gun violence and innocent lives being lost, so such a discussion isn't timely.

In fact, neither of those arguments holds up under scrutiny and are mostly designed to avoid consideration of workable solutions. The United States doesn't have a corner on mental illness, but it seems to have a corner on gun violence.

I think some scrutiny is warranted, and it's not just timely, it's long overdue. There are things that can be sensibly done to reduce some of the gun violence, even knowing that doing all of them won't completely eliminate gun violence. We should not let perfection be the unwitting enemy of the good.

**Reasonable people should be able to agree  
on these measures being implemented:**

1. No fly, no buy. That is to say, anyone who cannot pass muster enough to board a commercial airplane should not be allowed to buy a gun.
2. There should be no loopholes in required background checks, at gun shows or online -- wherever. Anyone who wants to buy a gun should have a satisfactory background check completed, however long that takes.
3. Anyone who has committed domestic violence, used a weapon to commit a crime of any kind, or has had a restraining order or no-contact order entered against them by a judge, should not be allowed to buy or own a gun.



[continued on page two]

["Gun Violence" / continued from page one]

4. Just as surely as bazookas are outlawed, automatic weapons should be banned (those where the shooter who merely pulls the trigger once and holds it can shoot until the magazine is empty).
5. Similarly, "bump stocks" that effectively convert a semi-automatic weapon to automatic operational capabilities, should be outlawed except for military use.
6. Ammunition clips should be limited to maybe six shells – that should be enough to dissuade a home intruder or kill a deer. Intruders and deer deserve a running chance by requiring a re-load after six rapid-fire shots.
7. No one under the age of 21 should be allowed to buy or be in possession of a gun of any kind; okay, strike that, a BB gun would be okay, but nothing more lethal than that.
8. Anyone who has been involuntarily committed for mental health treatment should not be allowed to buy or own a gun.
9. Mandatory mental health coverage under Medicare and Medicaid should be re-instated.
10. Local law enforcement should be able to blacklist anyone reasonably suspected of being mentally or emotionally unfit, subject to appellate rights to a judge.



11. There should be no unlicensed concealed carrying of a gun allowed except for law enforcement. Bodyguard contractors/employees should also be an exception if they are first trained and certified as such.
12. Sales to an intoxicated person should be prohibited just as surely as selling alcohol to an intoxicated person is currently, and gun sellers should be required to carry liability insurance like dram shop insurance currently required of bartenders.
13. Possession of a loaded gun by someone impaired by alcohol or drugs should be a criminal offense.

**STOP  
GUN  
VIOLENCE**

April's

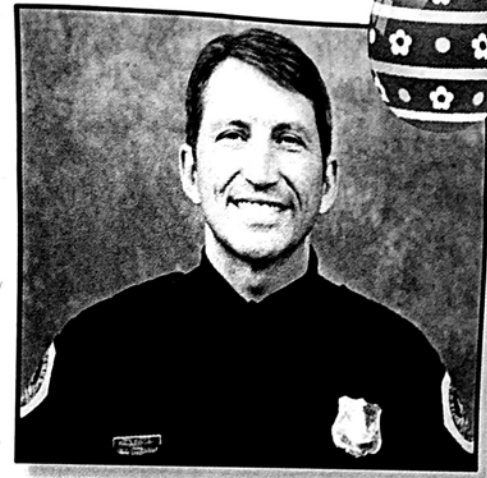
Speaker:

**Paul**



Mark Your  
Calendar

**Parizek**



Our speaker in April will be Des Moines Police Sergeant Paul Parizek. You have seen him frequently interviewed in the immediate aftermath of a serious crime or accident. You won't want to miss this. You are encouraged to invite your friends to attend!!

# RuPaul Is Not Our Enemy

by Jordan Duesenberg

It's no mystery that in today's day and age, if you're not careful what you say in public (offline or online), it could come back and haunt you. Whether that's justified or not is the question. While I agree that there are some truly horrible things people say that need to be corrected -- such as the majority



of what comes out of Trump's mouth -- sometimes people say things that we don't agree with, and they truly don't intend to be hurtful, they might not know better, or they simply made a mistake. This is where RuPaul comes in.

Today, there is no television show that is more important to gay culture than RuPaul's *Drag Race*. For those of you who don't watch the show (first and foremost, look at your life and look at your choices), it's a reality TV show that features drag queens competing to be *America's Next Drag Superstar* in lieu of *Project Runway*, *America's Got Talent*, and *America's Next Top Model*, which is hosted by RuPaul Charles of 80s and 90s fame. The show is much more than just a reality TV competition, as it continues to showcase LGBTQ problems and issues to mainstream culture. It's the reason that you have 13-year-old girls in the suburbs of middle America hollering out, "yasss queen" and, in my opinion, adds to the acceptance of LGBTQ individuals in the upcoming generations. It's personally what I look forward to every week, and it instantly cheers me up no matter what mood I'm in.

In a lot of ways, you could say RuPaul has done more than many people in progressing the LGBTQ community's message of acceptance, which is why I'm confused why many in the LGBTQ community insist on tearing down RuPaul for some comments he made in an interview with *The Guardian*. In this interview, trans issues were brought up and RuPaul made the comment that he "probably [would] not [accept trans women who had fully transitioned on to his show]. [That] you can identify as a woman and say you're transitioning, but it changes once you start changing your body. It takes on a different thing; it changes the whole concept of what we're doing."

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## Briefs ✓ & Shorts:



Thanks to Marcus Turnage for introducing our March speaker, Ann Selzer, CEO of the polling firm, Selzer and Company. Thanks to **Brian Taylor Carlson** for his work on the FFBC website. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter production editor. Thanks to **Ryan Weidner** for his work as our technology guru.

A special thank-you to those FFBC members who have chosen to designate FFBC through the Donor Direct program of United Way. The contributions through United Way are tax deductible.

The next copy deadline for the FFBC newsletter will be April 16, 2018. If you have something on your mind, put it on paper and get it to me by the copy deadline. It'll be interesting, good therapy, or both. Caring is sharing.

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.



## Mark Your Calendars!

### FFBC Speakers Announced:

**May: Keith Snow**

(CEO of the personal data "mining" firm, B2E Data Marketing, Inc.)



**June: Brad Clark**

(Executive Director of the Gill Foundation)

**July: Tom Vilsack**

(40<sup>th</sup> Governor of Iowa and former United States Secretary of Agriculture)



# A Message from Matt McCoy

by Iowa State Senator Matt McCoy



Dear Fellow Members,

Nearly 60 days ago, I announced that I would not be seeking re-election to the Iowa Senate. Instead, I am seeking the Democratic nomination for Polk County Supervisor District 5.

There are so many reasons why you should care about electing me to this important post:

1. Mental health funding and coordination of services in Polk County.
2. Supportive health services through the department of public health, which provides vital health screenings, immunizations, and STD testing.
3. We are currently drinking out of the Raccoon River, which has the highest nitrate level in the country and has been linked to cancer and other forms of birth defects.

These are three major problems that I want to work on as your county supervisor. I need your help.

I have roughly sixty days to reach out to more than 60,000 residents in my district. I need you to volunteer to do neighbor-to-neighbor postcards, phone calls, door knocking, or host meet & greets in your home. It's easy to get involved, and all I need you to do is call Taylor: 515-210-7924 and we'll get you scheduled. I will also be hosting an "FFBC Day of Action" where we will be asking for help in my campaign.

Challenging an incumbent with a big war chest is difficult, but I believe that with your help, we can win and ensure that LGBTQ community finally has a seat at the table in Polk County.

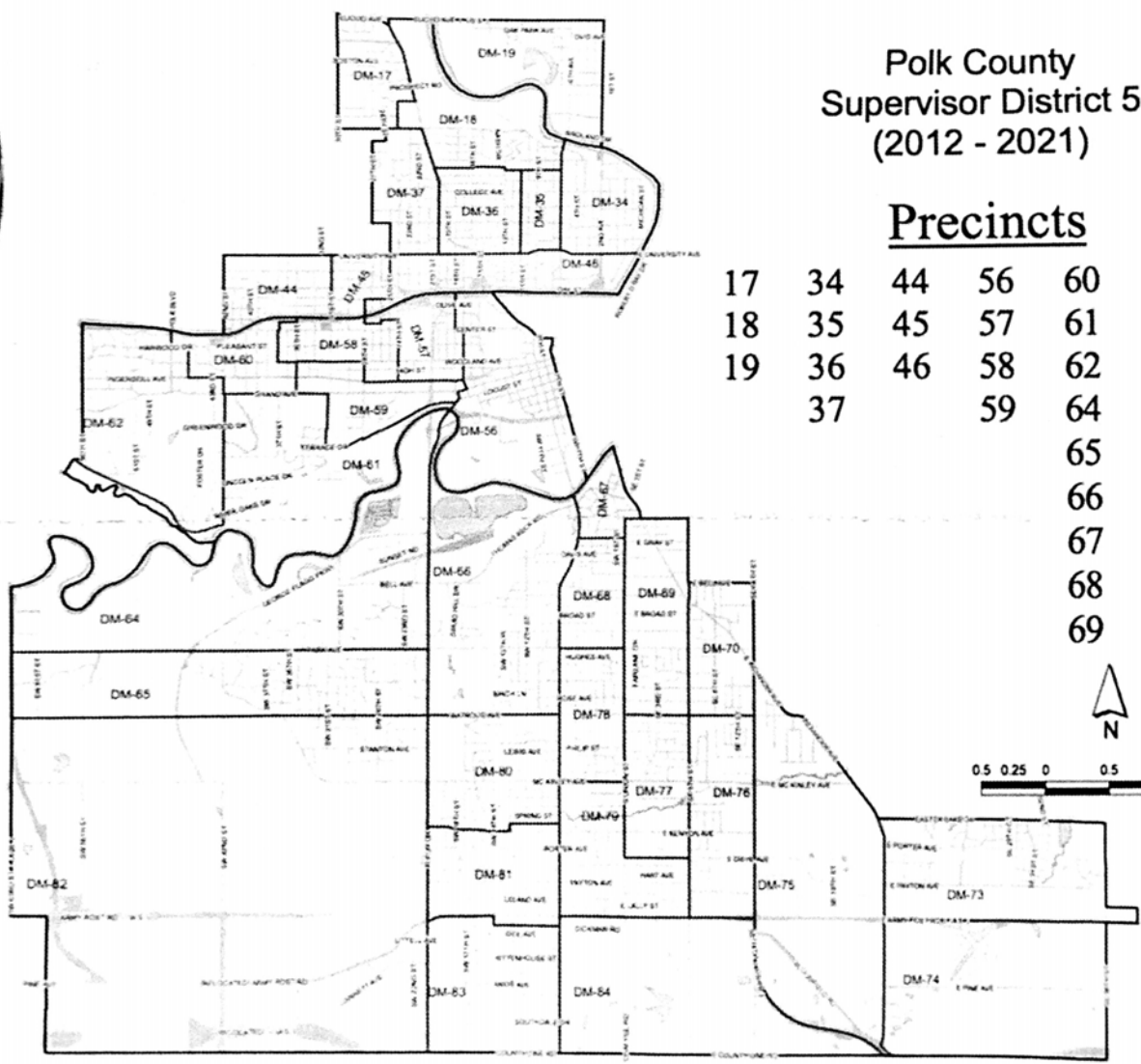


Polk County  
Supervisor District 5  
(2012 - 2021)



## Precincts

17	34	44	56	60	70	80
18	35	45	57	61	73	81
19	36	46	58	62	74	82
37			59	64	75	83
				65	76	84
				66	77	
				67	78	
				68	79	
				69		



Polk County Election Office  
120 Second Ave. Suite A  
Des Moines, Iowa 50309  
Phone: (515) 286-3247  
election@polkcountyowa.gov

Legend  
 Supervisor District 5  
 precincts  
 roads  
 water

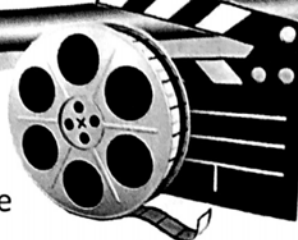
**All people smile in the same language,  
but not for the same reasons.**





# Black Panther

Movie Review by Mark Turnage



Part of the magic of the Marvel Cinematic Universe is getting two movie genres in one superhero film; with **Black Panther**, director Ryan Coogler wisely stayed true to the rich source material: an Afro-futuristic, Shakespearean action movie that centers on the Wakandan royal family and their struggles with father figures, reparation, and isolationism vs. globalism.

The world of Wakanda is immersive, vibrant, and a utopia of African cultural pride. Black female family figures and Black experience take priority, and it's refreshing to see whiteness take a cinematic backseat in favor of emphasizing Wakandan/African culture. The contrast of white minority is played to hilarious effect in scenes with Martin Freeman's Everett Ross and Latitia Wright's tech-wizard Shuri, who ribs his fuzzy yet opportunistic C.I.A. agent with barbs such as "colonizer." Chadwick Boseman's T'Challa is a loyal protector and dignified leader that's also vulnerable, conflicted, and human in his questions of how to lead his country into the future while also honoring his family's and his nation's traditions. "It's hard to be a good man and a good king," his father T'Chaka warns, and with reason.

I say "Shakespearean" because the plot centers around the legacy and sins of the Wakandan royal family, which T'Challa navigates as the recently-crowned king, eventually discovering a threat to the kingdom which itself hides a bigger problem: another heir to the throne. Before T'Challa can assume the title, his culture demands gladiatorial combat (*sans* superpowers) with any and all challengers to prove he is worthy. It's a premise that is telling when read culturally—for Wakandans, honor and privilege must be fought for tooth and nail to be gained, and neither is safe once earned.

Enter the antagonist: Michael B. Jordan's Erik Killmonger. Cold, cunning, culturally cognizant, and street-savvy, these factors alone would make him a memorable character. But his grounded, all-too-real backstory solidifies him as the most fully-realized of Marvel's cinematic supervillains. You know you've done an antagonist right when you can find empathy with their motives: ignite a global revolution against racial oppressors—and create a Wakandan Empire, no matter how bloody the cost. Coogler complexifies Killmonger as both a bereaved child victim of racism and poverty and as an encapsulation of toxic masculinity, exemplified by his arrogance and treatment of every woman around him as a disposable object. Arguably, the approach places Jordan's portrayal in the same field as Heath Ledger's Joker. He's a terrifyingly real character to watch.

But the true scene stealers are the film's women: Latitia Wright's tech-wizard Shuri, Lupita Nyong'o as the insightful and resourceful spy Nakia, Danai Gurira as the hardened but maternal general Okoye, and Angela Bassett as queen Ramonda. Each of these women offers her own spin on what it means to be a leader, but also what it means to be an at-risk humanitarian nation versus a secure isolationist one. In addition, they question where their own loyalties lie—to each other, to the throne, to a people. Maybe even more so than **Wonder Woman**, women are the guts of **Black Panther**.

The film is a special-effects showcase, but with bleeding-edge technology as a central plot point, it functions as a badass accessory rather than a central focus. The car chase scene and finale stand out as special-effects achievements that felt tense and exciting rather than tentpoles to mask a shallow plot.

The feeling **Black Panther** leaves you with is two-fold inspiration: the look of awe a young Black boy gives the mythic superhero he sees himself as, and that Wakanda is not just a place but a state of being, an example for the world to learn from and live by. **Black Panther** succeeds at that, too.



# Paid to Figure Out What We're Thinking

by Bruce Carr



J. Ann Selzer, who grew up in Kansas, calls herself "an Iowan by choice." She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas, then completed a Ph.D. in political communication and polls at the University of Iowa in 1984. After an academic fellowship in England at the University of Reading and a Congressional fellowship in Washington with then-Representative Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, and a couple of jobs in polling and one in jury-consulting ("so ugly!" she's said), she returned to Iowa and joined the staff of *The Des Moines Register* in 1987 to run the paper's prestigious Iowa Poll. She formed her own firm in 1992, a platform from which Selzer has, in addition to gathering, analyzing, and reporting data for the last 26 years, earned a reputation as an outstanding data communicator, appearing on every major television, print, and radio news outlet, including multiple appearances on PBS *NewsHour*, *Morning Joe* on MSNBC, CBS's *Face the Nation*, NPR *Morning Edition*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and many others. She also gave a featured TEDx speech in 2012. Selzer is politically unaligned, which distinguishes her from most competitive polling firms.

As well-recognized in Des Moines as she is nationally, Ann Selzer sings alto with the Des Moines Choral Society, has won a competitive Scrabble tournament, was awarded a blue ribbon at the Iowa State Fair, and was named Woman Business Owner of the Year in 2011 by the *Des Moines Business Record*. Selzer tweets from @jaselzer, and you can reach her at her office, Selzer & Company, 308 5th St, West Des Moines, IA 50265, telephone 515/271-5700 or email <info@selzerco.com>.

Our guest speaker on Friday morning, March 2, was J. Ann Selzer, president and owner since 1992 of the polling firm Selzer & Company, which operates from right here in West Des Moines. "Polling puts Selzer in the spotlight," notes the firm's Website, "but she attracts a wide range of clients, conducting audience development and strategic research for nonprofit organizations and for-profit companies, including a grocery store chain, advocacy groups, health care organizations, financial institutions, universities, agencies, and a technology start-up."

Selzer's remarks to us concentrated mostly on the political side of her business. Armed with a pretty wonky series of line-graphs, she outlined a history of poll-predictions through several recent national elections, and brought the results into fascinating focus with her wry outlook and speedy presentation. As for voters in the most recent presidential election, politics-as-usual is just tired. She recalled thinking back as far as a 1975 episode of *M\*A\*S\*H* (about dinner options in the frontline mess-tent) and quoting Hawkeye's explanation that it wasn't about the options offered, it was about "We. Want. Something. Else." And if you really listened to the 2016 electorate, they surely wanted (and got) Something Else.

Nor is this attitude entirely lamentable, she noted. "We Want Something Else" is exactly what those extraordinary Parkland (FL) High School students are so assertively announcing to government leaders and the media about gun violence. Millennials are values-driven, Selzer said, citing results from her work for the Fareway grocery store chain, and they shop (and vote) their values. *You can hear, or re-hear, a complete audio recording of Selzer's talk by going to our Website, <ffbciowa.org> and clicking on the "Speakers" tab.*



Photo by Gary Moore

While I don't necessarily agree with RuPaul, as many of his contestants have come out as trans after competing and have continued to have illustrious careers as queens. Among other reasons, I still respect RuPaul for having that opinion. However, as the Internet does, Twitter, Instagram, etc. have started to tear RuPaul down in every way imaginable, calling him a bad person, transphobic, outdated, etc. There have been think-pieces about how problematic RuPaul is and how we deserve better, as if all the good that RuPaul has done for the last 20 or so years is completely erased by a few comments. RuPaul has since apologized and still people continue to go off.



We've seen this again and again, and it really makes me wonder, why are we doing this? Why can't we simply start a conversation without name calling? Do people really think RuPaul is our enemy because of a few comments? I consider myself progressive, but in this ultra-progressive day and age, it seems like you can't say anything without the Internet or people trying to censor what you say because they were offended. Today we need to have more conversations and listen to things that we might not agree with or even make us uncomfortable, because a conversation eventually leads to change. If we could take all this negative energy that's going towards RuPaul, who clearly loves and cares about the LGBTQ community, and put it toward political action against lawmakers and politicians who clearly don't care about our community, we can do incredible things. RuPaul is not our enemy, he just made a mistake.

## The Palm Springs Experience

by Allen Vander Linden

My husband, Michael, and I have recently returned from our fourth year renting a condo and spending time in Palm Springs. Our time there has expanded from four weeks annually to now eight weeks with another eight weeks planned for next year. Obviously, Palm Springs is a place that we very much enjoy. There we find a nice balance between physical, social, and leisure activities.

Palm Springs is beautiful, with mostly blue skies, warm to moderate temperatures, palm trees, and mountains. It is a smaller city, full of restaurants, shopping, and entertainment possibilities, and is easy to get around. There is more to see and do in the nine other cities down the Coachella Valley southeast of the city as well.

Although the mayor and city council members mostly are gay, we understand that the official city population is no more than 20% gay/lesbian. Whatever the percentage is, our world there is about 100% gay. There, we seem to live in this "bubble" where nearly everyone is older, retired, and gay, with political perspectives similar to ours. It is very easy to meet people and make friends. Everyone is originally from someplace else. Most own a home and are there either full time or also have a home elsewhere and leave during the hot summers. Others, like us, rent a place in the winter.

Why do we spend our time and money to go to Palm Springs? Of course, our Palm Springs experience differs from many others. We don't play golf, sip margaritas for hours by a pool, or go bar hopping. Initially, our motivation was just to get away from the cold of Iowa winters. Now we have found many more reasons to spend time there. It feels like an "alternate life style."

Our physical activities this year have included six hikes into the mountains, including Joshua Tree National Park; joining the local Front Runner/Walker group for their two or three-mile morning walks; and working out at a local gay (or nearly all gay) gym. Through social activities, it is very easy to connect with people that we have known for some time now, and we always meet new people. They include one or two social mixers a week, usually held in a gay bar and attended by about 60 to over 100 gay men. These are sponsored by the local PrimeTimers or Front Runner/Walker groups. I enjoy meeting and visiting with some of the roughly 60 people on the three-mile walks and sometimes coffee afterwards. About a couple times a week we invite folks to our home, or we are invited by friends to their home for dinner, or just drinks and snacks. Or, we go out for breakfast or lunch with friends.

In addition, we find more time for leisure and relaxation in Palm Springs than we do at home in Des Moines. Without other distractions at our Iowa home, Michael is able to spend more time on his abstract oil painting. I am able to read six books, much more than I ever do in Iowa. We find it easier to run off to local art festivals, movies, or other areas of interest. I have been able to continue my volunteer work (remotely) for Iowa Legal Aid, and I attend board and committee meetings for One Iowa by telephone. Although we like to keep visits short, we have enjoyed receiving several friends as house guests.

For anyone wanting to avoid the Iowa cold and make new friends, we highly recommend a Palm Springs getaway. Renting a condo in Palm Springs is costly, but there are also a wide range of costs, depending on the rental unit size, location of the rental unit, eat out or at home, driving or flying and car rental. Despite the cost, when thinking of it from a bigger picture perspective of what we enjoy in life, we find it well justified.





# Bully

by Brian Taylor Carlson



closer. First, she put her hand in mine. Then, her hand was on my lap, inching ever higher up my leg. Just as she was about to go for it, I grabbed her hand and pulled it away. She made an audible, infuriated huff and moved to the other side of her seat, sulking and pouting. I continued to watch the movie, munching on popcorn and sipping on Coca-Cola.

After the movie, I took her home. We didn't say much to one another. I knew people at school would know about our date, and I was quite happy that my classmates would assume accordingly that I was heterosexual and would allow my charade to continue. My weird, nerdish behavior could go on, and I could focus on what was important—getting a good education so I could escape poverty. The remainder of the weekend was uneventful.

Monday morning, I pulled my car into the school parking lot. As I got out of the car, I felt people looking at me. I looked up and was met with sneers by a group of girls leaning on a car nearby. I turned around to see if this was directed to someone else, and my gaze was met by another group of students who were looking at me and whispering. I felt like I was in some bizarre episode of *The Twilight Zone*.

I walked into the school, and the looks and whispers continued. Dale Clark stood at his locker, talking to a few other guys from the football team. He saw me approaching and said, "Here comes the faggot."

"Hey faggot," Dale's friends said in unison. People around us began to snicker. I was mortified. I felt my face turn to fire. Bombs exploded in my heart, and the feeling in my gut sank lower and lower. Every footstep felt like I was struggling against the gravity of Jupiter. Every second felt like an eternity as I walked past my sweet, handsome Dale Clark, who was now ridiculing me in front of what felt like the entire school.

I felt a hard shove in the middle of my back. My books flew out of my hand and fell to the floor, scattering and sliding all over the hall as I stumbled forward to regain my footing. I turned around to see who shoved me. Dale, with a menacing grin, towered before me. His friends stood behind him, leering.

"What are you gonna do about it, faggot?"

I was in a state of shock. I turned around to gather my things. My friend Christy Ward had begun to pick up my books into a pile. I wanted to crawl underneath the linoleum and die.

The remainder of that day was pure hell. Every class was even worse than the one before it. The coldness, the stares, the sneering, and the words muttered under the breath, hit me like cobblestones, weighing me down with despair.

Shannon Foskey had spread the news around the school that I was gay. The rumor flew across the airwaves like wildfire. The last few who didn't know on Monday morning were quickly filled in by peers. My life drastically changed, and I began to withdraw into myself. Only my closest friends stood by my side—all girls. My male friends no longer wanted to be seen with me. I convinced my biology teacher to move me to the lab tables in the back of the classroom so I wouldn't have to see Shannon's smug looks during biology.

But what stung the most, what ripped my soul in half, was that Dale Clark became my bully. Dale Clark, who had always nodded at me in class and in the hallway, was now capable of harm and violence toward me. His seething hatred flowed under my every step with every push, trip, and spiteful word, further encasing my heart with sorrow.

[continued on page nine]

I was in love with Dale Clark. He was tall and tan with blonde hair and icy blue eyes. He had a deep, sexy voice that rumbled like a tremor from his chest. I found myself staring at him in class constantly. We weren't in very many classes together because I tended to gravitate toward academics and A.P. classes. But I was lucky enough to have a few required classes with this gorgeous boy.

Dale was the captain of the football team and a surfer. Our high school was only a 30-minute drive to the beach, so when Dale wasn't busy playing football, he would drive his olive-green Volkswagen to Ocean City, surfboards attached to the top of his car, upside-down so that the fins looked like shark fins gliding through the school parking lot.

I watched Dale's muscular butt as he walked down the hallway. I watched Dale at football practice through the windows while I rehearsed after school for plays and concert choir, or participated in academic programs. I took extra care not to get caught studying every inch of him. I fantasized about professing my love for him and telling him how his mere presence made me feel hopeful that something could happen between us.

I dreamed of kissing him, running my fingers through that shock of sandy blonde hair, touching that sun-bronzed skin. He was my first crush. The girls I went on dates with in high school didn't know about my enormous crush on Dale.

Near the end of tenth grade, a girl in my biology class, Shannon Foskey, asked me out to a movie. I never really thought of her as someone I would be interested in—particularly as a potential date. But even in high school, I knew I, at least, had to make an effort to cover up my sexuality by perpetuating the illusion of heterosexuality. After all, it was 1987 in a small, conservative town on the eastern shore of Maryland. I said yes, and we decided to see *Stand by Me*, a coming-of-age movie about a group of adolescent boys who embark on a journey to find a dead body.

I picked Shannon up at 6-ish. She was a larger girl, with blonde hair and blue eyes. She wore heavy eye makeup and had styled her hair into the hot look at the time—big, teased, and heavily shellacked with Aqua Net. She wore a scoop-neck top, showing off her cleavage, and a black miniskirt with black hose and black heels. As I was in my goth stage, dressed in all black with eyeliner and black fingernail polish, we made quite the pair. This wasn't how she usually dressed. At school, she was usually seen in ripped jeans and oversized sweatshirts worn off-the-shoulder like Debbie Gibson.

We grabbed a meal at an inexpensive and mediocre restaurant du jour. Over dinner, she told me three times that she was sexually active. I shrugged it off. I told her that my goal was to keep my virginity until I was married. She was having no part of that, and told me about her sexual escapades with upperclassmen. I stuck to my guns and told her that, however the evening progressed, it was never going to be below my belt or hers. She told me that my mother's apron strings were tied around me too tight. At this point, I knew she wasn't going to take 'no' for an answer. But, I didn't care. She mentioned that she was sexually active again at least twice on the way to the theater.



That year, I went to my guidance counselor—the same woman who denied my access to taking Latin classes because I wasn't rich enough. "Only doctors' and lawyers' kids take Latin," she said. "You have your choice of French or Spanish." She told me that Dale's behavior was just a phase and that by eleventh grade, most kids will have forgotten about this year's shenanigans.

Nothing could have been further from the truth. In fact, it became worse. Much worse. No matter where I was or what I was doing, Dale and his friends would find me and humiliate me in front of my friends. He had been lifting weights, and he looked absolutely stunning. And terrifying. I found myself taking the long way around the school campus so I wouldn't have to face him. I had avoided him down to a science. I knew where all his classes were located, and I avoided him at all costs.

Twice during my eleventh-grade year, I approached my guidance counselor again. I practically begged her for help. Both times, she shooed me away and said it was just a phase and to just ignore him. I was at the end of my rope. I had begun to harden, and I had begun to rebel against my fellow students' social hierarchy. I had had enough. But summer came, and I finally had a reprieve.

During the beginning of my senior year, I was excited. My grades were excellent; my prospects for college looked great, and I was ready to go out with a bang.

One morning, things worked against me to the point of frustration. My mother and I had a terrible fight, my car wouldn't start, and my concert choir class ran late, as I needed to discuss an upcoming role in the school musical. I had no choice but to take the short way to my next class. I crossed my fingers that I would not run into Dale and his cronies. But it was inevitable.

"Hey, here comes the faggot!"

"Look at this queer."

A feeling I had never felt before welled up inside me. I wasn't sure what it was at the time.

"Hey, faggot! Where are you going? Makeup class?"

The snickers came.

The leering came. The feeling inside me grew stronger and stronger exponentially. My jaw clenched. I braced for the push or shove that was coming.

This time, I held onto my books. But a loud ringing had begun inside my head, like a high-pitched whistle. My body went numb. I slowly turned around to face Dale Clark.



# BULLYING

People said I threw my books to the ground, reached up and grabbed Dale Clark's head and pulled it down. I slammed his face into my knee. He lost his balance and fell to the floor. I jumped on top of him and pummeled his face with my fists. I began to slam his head into the floor. When teachers pulled me off Dale, I started to come out of my trance. As I was being pulled away, I hurled a wad of spit onto his face.

But I wasn't finished. I needed to know how he felt that very moment.

"How does it feel to get your ass kicked by a faggot?"

Seeing him lying there broke my heart. I was torn between being absolutely sick and tired of his constant torture and heartbroken that what could have been at least a beautiful friendship had come to this violence instead.

I was immediately escorted out of the school and told to go home. That week, I was almost expelled, but I stood my ground with school officials, determined to stick up for myself. I had documentation and witnesses to the bullying. I presented signed copies of my visits with the useless guidance counselor. In the end, I was only suspended for five days.

Dale Clark came back to school with a neck brace. I came back to school to applause and a standing ovation in my concert choir class. The rest of the day was uneventful. My eyes never met Dale's for the remainder of the year. He did not attend graduation. Dale's parents tried to sue me and my mother, but soon after they realized that we had no money, the lawsuit was dropped. Rumor had it that his mother believed my story over his. Regardless, poverty can be a strong defense.

High school changed that year. People left me alone to pursue my nerdy interests and academic endeavors. I have since come to understand that what I felt was rage. I have vowed never to allow myself to reach that point in my adult life. I never lost my virginity in high school—to a girl or to a boy. I may not have had any romantic encounters. One thing will remain with me forever: I was in love with my bully.

**It's better  
to fix  
mistakes  
than to fix  
blame.**

The Iowa Senate passed a bill that would make felons of doctors who perform an abortion after detection of a fetal heartbeat, arbitrarily deciding that "life" capable of being murdered begins then. I'm confident that most supporters actually believe that murderable "life" begins at conception. Most would also rest their belief on supposed Biblical teaching. And I'd say poppycock. The Bible does speak explicitly about when "life" begins. Genesis 2:7 says "... then the Lord God formed man from the dust on the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." Fetal viability is when "life" as a living being begins; thus sayeth the Lord. Coincidentally, thus also sayeth Roe v. Wade. Those who support the Senate bill need to be doing a little less Bible thumping and a little more Bible reading. --J. Wilson

# Leonardo da Vinci

Written by Walter Isaacson

A Book Review by Steve Person

Famed writer Walter Isaacson, the celebrated author of biographies of Steve Jobs, Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin, and Henry Kissinger, among others, chose as his latest subject the incomparable Renaissance genius, Leonardo da Vinci.

Leonardo, born April 15, 1452, entered this world as the bastard child of Piero and an unmarried peasant girl named Caterina. Piero made a comfortable living as a notary, a profession that permeated through the males in the family tree. Since Leonardo was a bastard, his education lacked the refinement of a middle-class education. According to Isaacson, "Because Florence's guild of notaries barred those who were *non legittimo*, Leonardo was able to benefit from the note-taking instincts that were ingrained in his family heritage, while being free to pursue his own creative passions. Another upside for Leonardo of being born out-of-wedlock was that he was not sent to one of the 'Latin schools' that taught the classics and humanities to well-groomed aspiring professionals and merchants of the early Renaissance."

Isaacson based his book on the prolific notebooks that Leonardo kept throughout his life. Curiosity is a word that best describes Leonardo's writings in his various notebooks, ideas spewing forth from everything: human dissection and anatomy to a note on one page that states, "Describe the tongue of a woodpecker." Leonardo, above all, was an observer, a man intent on finding, describing, and depicting details. When a person looks at one of his drawings or paintings, the fine traces integrate themselves so naturally that art becomes obvious, a trick to the eye that appears to obscure its intricacy. Leonardo perfected the artistic use of *sfumato*, "With no sharp lines, enigmatic glances and smiles can flicker mysteriously." An obvious example is his *Mona Lisa*, a painting that Leonardo was commissioned to execute by the subject's husband. Leonardo never actually completed the work and added touches to it over sixteen years until death took him away from his beloved Florentine model. The husband never received the painting. It now hangs in the Louvre in Paris.

Leonardo was a homosexual. He reveled in the company of young men and one of his favorites was a boy named Andrea Salai. Leonardo often used him as a model. Famous male nude drawings of Salai are now housed in Windsor Castle. Leonardo humorously described the male organ as such: "The penis sometimes displays an intellect of its own. When a man may de-

sire it to be stimulated, it remains obstinate and goes its own way, sometimes moving on its own without the permission of its owner. Whether he is awake or sleeping, it does what it desires.... Man is wrong to be ashamed of giving it a name or showing it, always covering and concealing something that deserves to be adorned and displayed with ceremony."

Gee, I wish I had said that!

