

First Friday News & Views

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

May 2018

Volume 23

Issue 5

The next FFBC meeting is
Friday, May 4,
2018
7:00 a.m.



FFBC Meeting Location:
Hoyt Sherman Place,
15th and Woodland,
Des Moines, IA



R.S.V.P.

JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com

or phone

(515) 288-2500

by Wednesday,

May 2.



FFBC Website:
www.ffbc-iowa.org



There Oughta Be a Law

by Jonathan Wilson

We're being lied to – AGAIN. Many of us have dutifully filed our Iowa state tax returns. We've done so timely, incentivized by the prospect of penalties and interest accrual if we don't file timely and owe taxes above the taxes already withheld or paid in quarterly installments.

Of those of us who have filed timely, many have also been incentivized by the fact that we have, through withholding or installments, paid more than our tax liability, and we're due a refund. Therein lies the rub.

The refunds, that taxpayers are undeniably entitled to receive, are being inordinately delayed. The official reason being given by the state of Iowa is that the state is taking a little "extra time" to make tax refunds to conduct necessary audits to make sure that filers are not being fraudulent, and that extra effort takes time (see *Des Moines Register* December 11, 2017).

Time is money, as they say. If the truth were being told, the state is delaying refunds in order to deal with cash flow challenges and, frankly, to line the pockets of the state with the time value of the money represented by those delayed refunds. We're talking about big money, even at currently low market-place interest rates. Essentially, the delayed refunds represent a backdoor tax increase. Insult is added to injury when the state lies about the reason for the delays.

It's bad enough, although probably good policy, that our anticipated tax liability is withheld as the year goes along. Without the withholding, many of us would not have the available resources to pay the tax bill when it comes due, leaving those taxpayers in a financial bind and forcing the state to incur additional tax collection costs. The withholding also assures that the state gets some or all the taxes owed by folks who die during the year. So be it.



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But bad enough should be enough. When our taxes are due and we've paid more than was owed, refunds should be made promptly.

And that's where there ought to be a law. Assuming that taxpayers are incentivized to file and pay taxes timely in order to avoid penalties and interest, it stands to reason that the state would be similarly incentivized to make timely refunds if, past some reasonable period of time, the state would have to pay those receiving delayed refunds some amount of penalty and interest. Turnabout is fair play after all.

We can debate the appropriate amount of leeway the state should have after a refund tax return is filed, the amount of penalty beyond that point, and the rate of interest. Given modern technology, I think two weeks is enough time to wait for a refund; I think a ten percent penalty would be incentivizing; and I think an interest rate that is slightly above market rate would seem fair to taxpayers.

That little bit of reciprocity might go a long way toward empowering citizens and improving our perception of government.

Where's My Refund?



Mark Your Calendars!

FFBC Speakers Announced:



June:
To Be Announced



July: Tom Vilsack
(40th Governor of Iowa and
former United States
Secretary of Agriculture)



August:
Teree Caldwell-Johnson
(Board Chair, Des Moines Public Schools)

September: Brad Clark
(Executive Director of the Gill Foundation)



**Mark Your
Calendar**

May's Speaker:

Keith Snow



Our speaker in May will be
Keith Snow, CEO of the personal
data "mining" firm, B2E Data
Marketing, Inc. You won't want to
miss this. You are encouraged to
invite your friends to attend!!

**The secret of
patience is
doing something
else in the
meanwhile.**



InstaClones

by Jordan Duesenberg

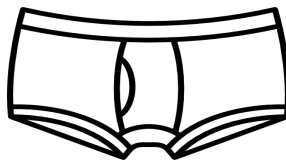
It's no mystery that gay men have a tendency to conform to one another. In the 1970s, gay men largely began to dress, act, and appear like they were masculine, working-class men, known then as Castro Clones (coming from the San Francisco gayborhood, The Castro), or simply Clones. The clothes were all the same: tight shirts, tight Levis, plaid, leather, and boots. Men often had lean muscles, mustaches, and short hair. The appearance was mostly a performative take on masculinity – think of Tom of Finland or 70s adult entertainer Al Parker. At the end of the day, this was all to feel part of a group identity – something you didn't want to deviate too far from.

Today a new Clone culture exists. However, it is heavily reliant on our social media personas. The new Clones are best represented by gay social media "influencers," a term that has been used for people who have a substantial influence on a large number of followers online. It is important to note that most gay influencers are given this title not because of some great feat that they've done for the community or something substantial they've done for society, but solely for their physical beauty – bulging muscles, six pack abs, usually facial hair (beards and lately mustaches), and short haircuts. They all dress the same (if dressed at all) in short shorts, Speedos, muscle tanks, jock straps, graphic tees that jokingly reference Queer topics, high fashion, or Queer clothing brands like Mr. Turk or Andrew Christian. They also post the exact same things, luxury travel pics (typically whatever circuit party they are attending wherever in the world), gym pics, posts with their gay celeb friends (think Gus Kenworthy, Terry Miller, and/or whatever *RuPaul's Drag Race* queen is at the top of her game) and, lastly, but most importantly, an excessive number of selfies. I call them **InstaClones**.

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Briefs ✓ & Shorts:



Thanks to Steve Person for introducing our April speaker, Sergeant Paul Parizek, Information Officer for the DMPD. 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. *Thanks to all our contributors to the monthly newsletter!*

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 May 14, 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. We are in the midst of our principal fund-raising effort so that we can maximize the number of scholarships that we can award. Thanks to a generous contribution from member Gary Moore, every dollar contributed goes exclusively to the scholarship program. We are awarding eight scholarships this year.

We're all going to die, and we can't take it with us. Contact Jonathan Wilson for details about legacy giving.



Those opposed to reasonable weapons regulation have been heard to argue that cars are used to kill people too and no one is calling for banning cars. The statement is true, but it misses the point -- two points, actually. First, cars are regulated. Guns should be too. Second, cars are not modified in a way to make them purposely more lethal for killing more people and unnecessarily for any legitimate use of the car.

On the Loss of a Dear Friend...

by Iowa State Senator Matt McCoy



We are all profoundly saddened by the loss of **Donna Red Wing**. Everyone who really knew Donna loved her. She was kind, wicked smart, and a champion for the underdog. Donna was described by the Christian Coalition as, “the most dangerous woman in America,” which makes her golden in my book. Throughout her life, she always stood for equality for all. She lived by these principles in her daily life.

As a visionary leader, she headed Interfaith Alliance and the Gill Foundation; she was also the National Policy Director for the Human Rights Campaign, National Director of GLAAD, Director of the Lesbian and Community Project, and a member of President Barack Obama’s kitchen cabinet on LGBT concerns.

She helped Iowans talk about being LGBTQ. She discovered Iowans who were forced back into the closet as they entered the twilight of life in nursing homes and assisted living communities. She helped educate healthcare providers about elderly gay Iowans and the importance of allowing them to live honestly by acknowledging their long-term partners.

Donna fought the fight for countless vulnerable Iowans and Americans, but she encountered her own vulnerabilities as she faced her battle with cancer. She was strong, courageous, and passionate. She was my friend, and I will miss her very much. I’ve lost a friend and so has everyone who is a member or ally of the LGBTQ community.



This is a statement that was released from her family shortly after her passing:

“Donna Red Wing spent a lifetime advocating for the poor, abused children, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, against war, bigotry, hatred and violence. She never made much money, but filled the hearts and souls of countless friends and thousands who benefitted from her life’s work, charisma, and positive attitude. Donna died on Monday, April 16, 2018, after an eight-month battle with cancer.

Donna was a revered and well-known national leader in the fight for LGBTQ equality, dedicating over three decades of her life to advocating for the LGBTQ community.

In Iowa, she served as executive director of One Iowa for over four years, launched an LGBT Advisory Council during her time as a Des Moines Civil and Human Rights Commissioner, and served as director of the Eychaner Foundation for the last two years. The Des Moines Civil and Human Rights Commission recently named their annual Lifetime Achievement award after Donna in recognition of her decades of activism.

Donna began her career as an activist working in the anti-war movement during the Vietnam war, after being born in a Salvation Army women’s shelter on August 26, 1950, and growing up in Worcester, Massachusetts, public housing projects.

Prior to moving to Iowa, Donna worked to stem the abuse of 4,000 children a year in Massachusetts. As Executive Director of the Lesbian Community Project in Oregon in 1992, she helped defeat the anti-gay ballot initiative Measure 9 campaign, and was featured in a Sundance Award-winning film about the 1992 struggle. The **Advocate** magazine named her “Woman of the Year” along with Hollywood mogul David Geffen, “Man of the Year.” She was Chief of Staff at the national Interfaith Alliance in Washington D.C., and was the first recipient of the Walter Cronkite Award for Faith & Freedom.

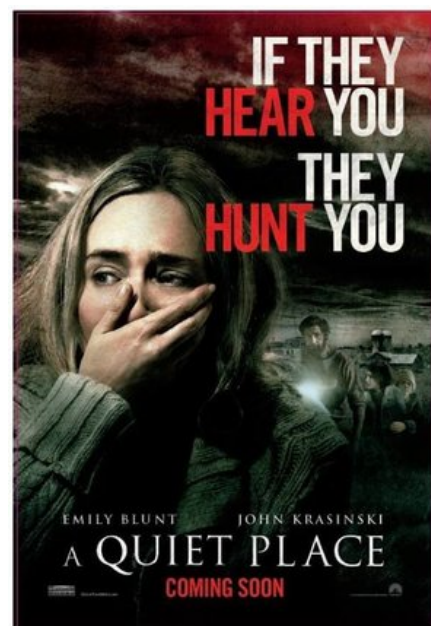
Donna was National Field Director of the Human Rights Campaign, and National Field Director for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). She was Policy Director of the Gill Foundation in Denver, Colorado, and was Howard Dean’s outreach liaison to the LGBT community. She was co-chair of the Obama for America 2008 LGBT Leadership Council. She also served as Executive Director of Grassroots Leadership.

She is survived by her wife and partner for over 30 years, Sumitra, son Julian, grandson Jasper, twin brother David. A celebration of her life will be held at a later date.”



A Quiet Place

Movie Review by Mark Turnage



It's fascinating to me how removing one of the senses entirely changes the experience of film. In John Krasinski's directing debut *A Quiet Place*, sound is the threat to one family's survival; any noise made instantly draws the wrath of vicious, unkillable monsters and certain death. For a horror movie, this experience ends up amplifying all other senses (including sound, since it's used so sparingly) and offers creative opportunities for tension-building, perilous situations, and powerful moments of nonverbal acting and expression. A waterfall becomes a confessional, a bathtub turns into a terrifying prison, Christmas tree lights herald a warning, and a newborn baby's cries create a threat to its own mother's survival. Of special note is an all-too-real sequence involving a grain silo that makes this lowan shudder.

A Quiet Place may not look it at first, but it's in the same vein of films such as *The Road*, *The Mist*, and other tales of a family surviving in a post-apocalyptic world. Krasinski uses a little to tell a lot; we don't see the apocalypse, we're already living in it. The world has ended, the monsters have won, and families like Krasinski's (who also stars in the film he directed) are the dwindling minority. The opening scene illustrates that these survivors are wary, smart, and have taken great pains to look out for and to protect one another, yet any lapse of high alertness yields swift and terrible consequences. The world-building efficiency in those opening few minutes tells us everything we need to know about the rural, ruined world this family occupies, and when sound does enter the picture, the audience fears it just as much as this family does. Clever stuff.

The story follows father Lee (Krasinski), mother Evelyn (Emily Blunt), son Marcus (Noah Jupe), and their deaf daughter Regan (Millicent Simmonds in a breakout role), who blames herself for a family tragedy and sees her differently-abledness as a disadvantage to the family's survival. The scenes with Regan tie the story together in heartfelt ways, exploring themes such as family guilt, loss, and responsibility and, ultimately, finding strength and power in hopeless times. Her character also defines American Sign Language as the primary dialogue of the movie and is a plausible explanation as to how this family survived a sound apocalypse while others didn't.

It's downplayed until the first fourth of the movie, but Evelyn is also pregnant. You have to be observant to do the math, but conception occurred well after the worst happened to the rest of the world. This is a family hell-bent not just on surviving, but *outliving,* and the portrait Krasinski paints is of a loving family worth caring about because it's worthy of surviving the worst. Every nonverbal cue within the family's interactions carries that weight.

See it, and avoid crunchy food, noisy snacks, or a loud cell phone during the show.



Shhh....





Photo by Gary Moore

Paul Parizek started off growing up in Del Rio, Texas, but his family returned to central Iowa when he was six, and he's been here basically ever since. He went to Merrill Middle School (where he was taught by future FFBC member Steve Person) and Hoover High School in Des Moines, took classes at Des Moines Area Community College and Upper Iowa University, then joined the West Des Moines Police Department as a reserve officer in 1991, as a way to get his foot in the door of his chosen career. (His first-choice career hadn't worked out, he says. "I wanted to be a professional baseball player, but I suck.") In July 2005, he joined the Des Moines force, where he worked patrol and, through self-study and experience, became an expert in gang enforcement. His specialty is outlaw motorcycle gangs ("It's sort of like organized crime with a street flavor," he says), and he teaches the topic at the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy.

Parizek was recognized in August 2011 as the top cop by the Midwest Motorcycle Gang Investigators Association and, in July 2012, as the Des Moines Rotary Club's police officer of the year. After Dana Wingert was named Police Chief in February 2015, he asked Parizek to join his office as the department's Public Information Officer, and Paul took up that post in July. Since then he has become the universally recognized TV-face of the Des Moines Police, honestly and unflappably answering journalists' questions about what just happened. Paul lives with his wife, Des Moines radio sportscaster Heather Burnside, in West Des Moines; he is on LinkedIn and can be reached by telephone at the Police Department's Public Information Office, 515/283-4084.

In Good Hands with the DMPD

by Bruce Carr



Our guest speaker on Friday morning, April 6, 2018, was Paul Parizek, Public Information Officer of the Des Moines Police Department. A voluble man who clearly loves his job and takes pride in his colleagues, the sergeant entertained and enlightened us with some cogent remarks about several current law-enforcement issues.

You can hear, or re-hear, a complete audio recording of his talk by going to our Website, <ffbc-iowa.org>, and clicking on the "Speakers" tab.

Parizek called body-cameras "one of the best things that's happened" in law enforcement in the past 25 years. Human behavior in tense situations has improved markedly – on both sides, civilian and professional – when people see that a camera's there, too. Although the recording device is not very expensive, archival management of the tape is costly in time, space, and personnel – but still worth it for the increased level of justice it makes possible.

Parizek noted Chief Wingert's insistence on increased visibility of all facets of Des Moines police, as a matter of trust, both for recruiting minorities in particular to join the force as officers and for enhancing citizen cooperation in investigations. He likes promoting neighborhood athletic partnerships, and he has recently taken on management of the DMPD Facebook page (with advice and help from his more social-media-savvy wife).

There was much more, and this reporter came away from the meeting feeling—not for the first time—how lucky Des Moines is to have such a smart and attractive police force.



Photo by Gary Moore

There is no place better to see InstaClones than on Instagram. My feed is essentially the same person over and over again. Once you start following one beautiful gay influencer on Instagram, the app uses its algorithm to recommend 10 more that look just like him that post the exact same thing. It's important to remember that these are not celebrities, just gorgeous men. Because of this, it makes you personally feel like you too are capable of achieving their fabulous lives and receive hundreds of thousands (possibly millions) of followers in the process. All you have to do is lose that extra 15 pounds and put on 35 pounds of muscle. Once you attain that body, then you can also wear overly expensive Mr. Turks Speedos on your fabulous trip to Ibiza or to the White Party in Palms Springs with all your muscly, overly wealthy friends that look just like you, and you too can become best friends with Marc Jacobs. You can even make this a career – I met an InstaClone in person, and he told me that he gets paid enough for his sponsored posts that he doesn't even have to work. This is when you either start feeling bad about yourself and/or you start doing things that lead you to conform to these InstaClones.



I've expressed my dissatisfaction with social media, namely Facebook, in the past because I think it encourages us to put on a show for everyone around us (among many, many other things). My problem with this InstaClone culture is our idolization of them in our community. It makes us feel bad about ourselves and, subconsciously, makes us think that if we were more like these perfect images on the screen then, maybe, we'll feel better and can really be a part of something. I think it's problematic because it encourages young gay men who are coming to terms with themselves to think that this is the norm and that you can strive for a career based on nothing more than superficiality and your ability to find the right lighting for selfies. It's what leads to the phrase that we all too commonly see on dating apps that proclaims, "no fats, no femmes, no Asians," because the complete opposite of those descriptions is what receives adoration and likes.

I understand that beauty has always been something that has been admired in the gay community for generations, but never before has it been so accessible and in our faces – you don't need to live in a WeHo, The Castro, or Hell's Kitchen anymore to see men like this. You can live in the middle of nowhere and think that this is the norm, and be motivated to create yourself in their image. But just as the original Castro Clones were essentially performing their idea of masculinity, InstaClones are performing their idea of perfection. I mean, why face the ugly truths about ourselves when we can just be that pretty avatar you see on your phone screen?

LGBTQ Survey

Dear FFBC member/supporter,

We would like to invite you to take a new survey about your opinions and preferences, from an LGBTQ perspective.

There's power in our Pride! Participating in this study helps open doors and minds around the world, and influences positive changes for our community. Previous surveys have yielded 45,000 respondents from 150 countries! You may have seen Community Marketing & Insights quoted in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc.

Access the survey at the following address:

<http://survey.communitymarketinginc.com/se/359D342B1FBF9E7B?CMID=294>

It should take 10-12 minutes to complete. Everyone who completes the survey by **April 30th, 2018**, may enter into an optional drawing to win one of twenty US \$50 cash prizes, or if you win, you can designate a charity to receive the \$50.

Please forward this message to LGBTQ friends around the world who may be interested in participating. And please post it to your Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Instagram, etc. accounts!

Thanks very much for your participation.

-- Jonathan Wilson



Ever notice how often President tRump is seen with his arms folded defensively across his chest in the same position they would be if he were in a straightjacket? Maybe he's practicing?

I Blocked Over 1,500 Facebook Profiles. Here's What I Learned

by Brian Taylor Carlson

In 2016, I blocked my first handful of people on Facebook. I had engaged with several people who – I would soon learn – were paid Russian trolls who would go after anyone who said anything negative about a certain orange buffoon (I still have never referred to this person by name or official title). I was called an “idiot” and a “libtard” and a “cuck.” From CNN to MSNBC to ABC to CBS, the trolls proliferated and bombarded each comment thread with baseless, noxious rhetoric. And I blocked them. It was simple. I clicked on their profile, located the block function, and away they went forever.

But this was just the tip of the iceberg.

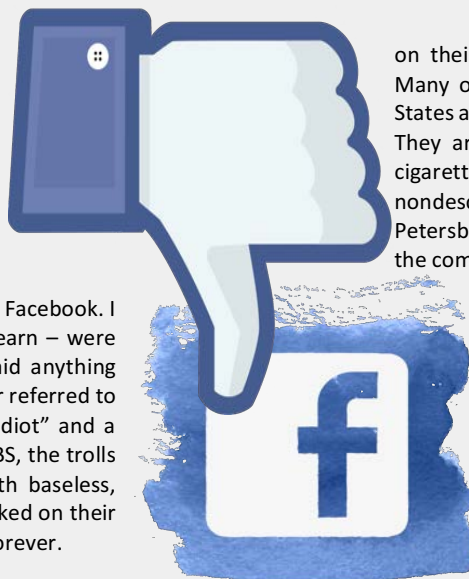
I soon found that my mother's sisters, who I refer to with every sense of the term as “the witches of Delmarva” are staunch supporters of the cantaloupe curmudgeon. Within mere seconds, they too were banished to my budding list of blocked persons. To be completely up front, my relatives had never been too thrilled to have a gay person in the family, and we used the upcoming election at that time to be rid of one another, since the only person who had kept us speaking (barely) was my mother who passed away in 2013. Since her passing, we had given up the forced niceties. And that was fine by me. Good riddance.

As time progressed, however, it became clear that the comments sections on major news pages were becoming avenues of hostility and outright hatred. I participated in these online “discussions” in various roles – being on the offensive, the defensive, the devil's advocate, and, with great amusement, the smart ass. Trolls have a way of moving instantly to your profile page and using what they see as ammunition in their retorts. After discovering this, I adjusted my privacy settings to that of a steel fortress.

I quickly began to notice a pattern. On every news article, the first people to comment only reacted to the headline and with quick and quick-tempered impulse. People weren't actually reading the article – including me (I allowed myself to get caught up in the comments). Each article had the same people commenting with rapidity and hostility, and their profiles were sealed as hermetically as baby formula. At first, I could see that any engagement with these folks was only an invite for more of the hostility and the name-calling. I watched as other poor souls would allow themselves to be caught up in the thread, and I observed that even more trolls would arrive onto the same thread to steamroll and drown that poor, unsuspecting person in a sea of WTF.

On more than one occasion, especially back in the days when I was drinking, I would lash out at these trolls and exact revenge. I would fight fire with fire. But that never worked. It would bring out more trolls and the thread would devolve into a back-and-forth volley of viciousness and vitriol. Invariably, there would be mention of “Killary and her emails”; I would always wake up the next day and begrudgingly delete all of my sophomoric comments.

I learned that these trolls and bots are quite good at their job. They disarm civilized conversation and discussion with aggression and seething anger. In an article by *The New York Times*, a former Russian troll was interviewed and gave a behind-the-scenes look at what it takes to aspire to this highly-coveted profession.



Professional trolls are hired based on their ability to speak American English. Many of them have traveled to the United States and have learned about our way of life. They are paid \$700 per month to sit in a cigarette smoke-filled cubicle in a nondescript building on the outskirts of St. Petersburg, working 12-hour shifts to work the comment threads of American news sites into a lathered frenzy of bitterness and ad hominem attacks. If that was my job and I got paid that little to do it, I would be hostile too. However, these people are deceitful and manipulative, inserting themselves into American political discourse in alarming displays of fiercely malicious intent to sow discord in our social and moral fabric.

Facebook has been accused of isolating people into a social bubble – coddling to their views and beliefs. People can fine-tune Facebook and only show what they want to see. This includes everything from news all the way down to cat videos. In my case, I see science news, outrageous food videos, and recipes. But we also have come to understand that our personal data has never been safe with Facebook. And we knew what we were getting ourselves into when we signed up. This is not news.

I began to miss reading articles, because I would be automatically drawn to the comment threads. I became disdainful of people (likely fake troll profiles) who would react with a laughing emoji on articles about death and disaster. If the post was a political article, you could be sure to see that laughing emoji as one of the prominent reactions. And the comments that were the closest to the top would be the most outrageous and ugly things I would read. And then I would be drawn to the reactions of people below the initial comment, soaking it all in mindlessly. By the time I got finished reading the argumentative and hostile language of the comment threads, I would exhaustively scroll on to the next posts, forgetting to read the article and missing out on the news until later.

I grew weary of seeing the same posts on the same types of articles from the same people on the pages of the same news sites.

So, I began to block some more. And it picked up speed.

I blocked with reckless abandon. I blocked freely and gratuitously and repeatedly. I took great joy in realizing that I would never have to read anything from that individual again. It was actually quite liberating. Profiles with five friends were blocked. Profiles with pictures of Confederate flags and “Don't Tread on Me” flags and guns and trucks and camouflage clothing and rotund men with wispy yellow hair were all blocked, and with great enjoyment.

If I saw the word “libtard,” block! If I saw the word “Killary,” block! If I saw “MAGA!” block!

It truly was therapeutic to clear up comment sections of news sites over time. After almost two years of blocking people, I have begun to notice something spectacular. I am seeing calm, peaceful discussion. I avoid Fox News and only stick with the major news outlets. I omit the negativity and embrace the civility. Instead of seeing open hatred and empty statements about liberalism being a mental disorder, I am seeing more tolerant and inclusive language among like-minded Americans who know how to treat one another with respect instead of the toxic behavior of tearing one another down.

[continued on page nine]



To all the naysayers and people who think I am further isolating myself from the discussion with all this blocking, *au contraire mon frère*. Ridding my life of negativity is not isolation. Just because I don't want to see abusive language on the Internet is not "living in a bubble." I refuse to think that just because I prefer not to see comments made by trolls and bots I am not willing to hear a different viewpoint or see another side of things.

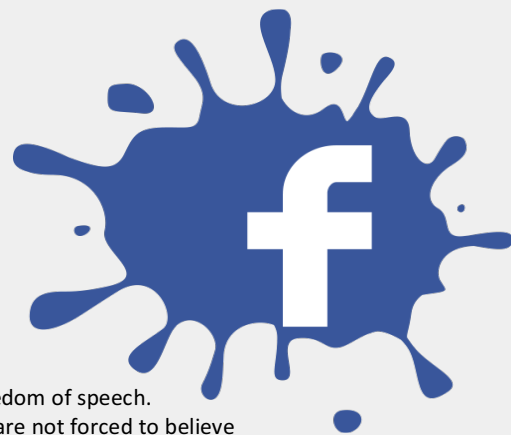
The bottom line is this: I am old enough to understand that everyone deserves to be heard, and everyone deserves the right to free speech. I am a mature adult and can articulate my own opinions without allowing myself to be insulted by someone who is being purposefully provocative on social media. I do not have to bear witness to hostility or hate speech in a public forum. If I am reading a book that I do not care for, I am not forced to continue reading it. I can put it down and move to another book I enjoy.

If I don't want to listen to someone, I don't have to. That's the beauty about freedom of speech.

The block function allows me to weed out words of hatred and intolerance. We are not forced to believe what another person believes, and that is pure joy. My blocking has cleared the way for the voices of people who can have a conversation and agree to disagree without seething hatred, tired talking points and mindless copy and pasting from a script of troll-isms. I am all for listening to someone with a different viewpoint, but I do not have to endure barbarism in the form of base language.

Today, I have blocked over 1,500 trolls on Facebook. I can now scroll through my newsfeed without seeing the same people commenting on the same articles, and I don't get caught up in the same distracted behavior. I don't have to be subjected to the constant bombardment of negativity and toxicity.

And now, instead of getting immediately caught up in the comment threads due to some outlandish statement made by an angry woman in Kiev, I can read the article instead.



Feverish Thoughts

by John Schmacker

I could tell I was coming down with something or other. Just a mild snuffle at first, an itchy throat. Take it easy for a day or two, Johnny. You are strong and healthy, and this will go away.

After two sleepless, hacking nights and a fever that spiked at 102.5 F, I was diagnosed with Influenza B and descended into the second or third ring of Hades. I lost count. That I can write about this now means that I have survived the worst of it, despite the lingering symptoms. Feeling better and feeling well are two different things. Cough suppressants, steroids, inhalers, Ibuprofen, my grandmother's Hot Toddy recipe (involving two ounces of bourbon): all these are medicinal and contributing to my recovery. Now, after blowing through several boxes of Kleenex, having had fitful sleep between bouts of incessant night-time dry coughs, I am fifteen pounds lighter, the house is a mess, and my trash bins overflow with spent Kleenex. Tidiness has been suspended. But I am beginning to feel better. Tomorrow or the next day I hope to have the energy to start cleaning up this place.

Somehow, the world kept moving right along without me. This did some damage to my sense of indispensability and immortality, as did flipping through the published obits of so many men younger than me. Iowans changed their clocks to Daylight Savings Time a couple weeks ago, but all my clocks are still on standard time. For want of its weekly winding, the wall clock hangs silently. The trains have not been running on time at my house. While I lie here in my feverish state, just a few blocks away the beautiful men of the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus performed their beautiful tribute to Tyler Clementi, without me there to hear it. My tax clients dropped off their records, or had their appointments postponed. The work piled up. The deer foraged through my east yard every morning. The Austin bomber ran amok. There were a few more school shootings. Trump lied. Republicans in the Iowa Legislature continued their campaign to dismantle our state government and feed the rich.

Somehow, I thought that reading *Fire & Fury* would lift my spirits. Not so much.

Kora, my gray cat, who routinely spends much of her day curled up asleep, now sleeps at the foot of my bed. I imagine she thinks I have just given up and adopted her lifestyle. For several days there, that didn't seem like such a bad idea. Squeak, bless her red tabby appetite, sees me as a food source and not much more. For her, it has been business as usual.

As with so much in life these days, just being careful is not enough. Driving carefully is not enough to avoid an accident. Being kind does not guarantee being treated kindly. The flu shot was not enough.

I know very well that I have friends who have or are enduring much more serious and painful illnesses than I have experienced. I wish them all comfort and recovery. I am grateful for my doctor, the several friends who looked in after me, who kept me supplied in chicken soup and other supplies, who gave me moral support, and for National Public Radio. I am grateful for having a comfortable place to be this miserable.

You do not want to come down with this stuff. It is awful.



Two Reviews of Sort-of Biographies

by Steve Person

Board of Directors:

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When I read a biography, one of the first things I do is to peruse the bibliography to see what sources the author used in writing about the person of note in the book. Primary sources are, of course, most desirable but not always possible when the subject died years earlier. Likewise, it is a good idea to see if the writer has written biographies of other personalities.

A new biography of the Duchess of Windsor hit the bookstores recently. Entitled *Wallis in Love*, the subtitle reveals what the author was really trying to accomplish. In this case it reads: *The Untold Life of the*

Duchess of Windsor, the Woman Who Changed the Monarchy. The author was none other than Andrew Morton. You may remember that Morton was the man to whom Princess Diana trusted intimate secrets and the resulting publication of *Diana: Her True Story*. Morton is what I call an Opportunist Biographer. That is a person who is more interested in lurid details than a scholarly approach to the life of the subject. With Diana, Morton saw an opportunity to exploit the misery of a fragile and disturbed young woman for the profit and sensationalism that resulted. With Wallis Warfield Spencer Simpson Windsor, Morton chose to smear the character of the duchess whose death more than thirty years ago closed an unhappy chapter in royal history. No primary sources are left to defend this unfortunate but flawed woman whose name the British royal family would rather forget. Edward VIII abdicated the throne in 1936 to marry the twice-divorced American he felt he could not live without. Morton claims to have uncovered numerous love affairs of the duchess both before and after her marriage to Edward, created the Duke of Windsor, after the abdication. While the book has a few interesting details, it is not one I would recommend as a true biography of the duchess. Among the sources NOT included in the bibliography are the Royal Archives located in Windsor Castle. Special permission must be granted by the Queen to do research there, and I have no doubt that such permission would never be granted to Morton.

The other book I am reporting on is *Avedon: Something Personal* by Norma Stevens and Steven M.L. Aronson. The book jacket claims it is "equal parts memoir, biography, and oral history...." Stevens acted as Avedon's personal assistant for the last thirty years of his life. Avedon, a creative photographer genius, is credited not only as one of the great fashion photographers of his time, but also as a man whose camera delved behind the less-than-commercial aspects of the human story. His unusual portraits of the sick and/or downtrodden reveal a side of the man that met with critical acclaim by some and derision by others. I don't usually write about a book that I did not finish reading, but I make an exception with this one. By the time I made it about half way through the book, I decided that Richard Avedon was a creep and a person whose work may have been exemplary in many ways but a man with a limited capacity for kindness or empathy.

I don't recommend either of these books because the former is suspect in its sources and the latter is just a sad comment about someone important but lacking in compassion.

