

FFBC

First Friday News & Views

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

October 2019

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The next FFBC meeting is
Friday, October 4,
2019
7:00 a.m.



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



R.S.V.P.

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or phone (515) 288-2500

or the website
by Wednesday,
October 2.



FFBC Website:
www.ffbc Iowa.org



Hey Voter, Can Ya' Spare Me a...Compass?

by Jonathan Wilson

Using sanity/insanity as a defense doesn't cut it to explain the spike in mass shootings that have been witnessed. This year the U.S. is averaging well over one mass shooting *per day* of innocent people occupying soft-target venues. Both the occupant of the Oval Office and his acting Chief of Staff have, since the examples in El Paso and Dayton, made public statements claiming that the *problem* is mental illness and that the solution is to address the *problem* of mental illness.

Everyone knows that an appropriate solution requires a proper understanding of the real problem. Absent a clear definition of the real problem, any purported solution as merely cosmetic. Window dressing. Not a solution. Their statements demonstrate the usual pattern of this Administration in these situations, trying to deflect the public dialogue toward what is not the real problem. That deflection, in this case, is trying to keep the public from connecting the dots between hateful rhetoric that demonizes categories of people and countenances acts of senseless violence. Conveniently, the deflection to mental illness as the problem, makes the real problem, essentially, unsolvable. The mentally ill, like the poor, will always be among us in some number and in varying degrees no matter what is done. The occupant of the Oval Office and the acting Chief of Staff both know that and, more importantly, know that it provides an excuse for not really doing anything tangible about the real problem that might offend the NRA.

The public should not be fooled yet again. Spewing hate filled rhetoric repeatedly to the public will inevitably fall upon the ears of folks who are poorly adjusted, mentally ill, or otherwise frustrated with the world around them, and who have a penchant for violence. Almost by definition, such people are more vulnerable to such rhetoric. It gives them focus; it gives them implicit permission to act out in anti-social ways, including violence; and it gives them targets -- soft targets best suited for the cowards that they are. Add to that mix the easy, lawful access to weapons of war that are designed only to kill people, and you have a prescription for gun violence and mass shootings.



[continued on page two]

How many times does it have to be said or demonstrated that "words matter," for that fact to sink in with our fellow citizens, including the Republican base? That base has, thus far, responded to inflammatory rhetoric as if they have lost their hearing, or lost their gag reflex?

We all know that we are known by the company we keep, and people who remain in the Republican Party today are keeping some pretty unsavory company. Sadly, that company includes conspiracy theorists, science deniers, white supremacists, white nationalists, members of the KKK, neo-Nazis, racists, misogynists, and the current occupant of the oval office.

They have become an embarrassment to the principles upon which our democracy was founded. An embarrassment to enlightenment and civility. An embarrassment to themselves. And an embarrassment to all they claim as friends.

There should be, and I think there will be, a price to pay when voters go back to the polls. Character counts, and so does lack of character. The current occupant of the oval office lacks a compass, moral or otherwise. Voters need to help him find his way out of the oval office.

Briefs & Shorts:



Thanks to **David Wilfahrt** for introducing our September speaker, **Suzanna de Baca**, CEO of Business Publications. Thanks also to **Jordan Duesenberg** 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 and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the Donor Direct program of United Way. The contributions through United Way are tax deductible. Those who have chosen this means of supporting FFBC have gone to the trouble of completing their United Way campaign worksheet by designating FFBC as the beneficiary of their generosity. FFBC is an eligible recipient of such funding designations.

The next copy deadline for the FFBC newsletter will be **October 14, 2019**. 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 awarded eight scholarships this year. We've awarded more than **\$275,000** in scholarships to deserving Iowa high school students. Our annual fundraising drive is currently in progress.

Don't Miss the
DEADLINE!

Mark Your Calendar

October's Speaker:

Jerry Foxhoven

Our speaker in October will be Jerry Foxhoven, the Reynolds-oust, former Director of the Iowa Department of Human Services. You won't want to miss this. You are also encouraged to invite some of your friends to attend!! Provide the name(s) of any anticipated guest(s) so we can have name tags for them at the registration desk.

You are invited



New Leadership at Business Publications Corporation

by Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday morning, September 6, 2019, was Suzanna de Baca, the new (since last January) President and Group Publisher of Business Publications Corporation (BPC). De Baca, who last appeared before us in February 2016 on behalf of Planned Parenthood, treated us to an eye-opening account of the extent and the inventiveness of the communications-media group she finds herself overseeing.

Reminding us that BPC traces its beginnings to 1981, when Des Moines publisher Connie Wimer (another former FFBC speaker) took over *The Business Record* and developed it into central Iowa's go-to source for real-estate and financial news. Suzanna de Baca outlined BPC's current production of printed materials, digital outputs, and community-celebration events into three divisions: *Business Record* and its relatives; *dsm* magazine; and "Write Brain," BPC's creative services and content marketing agency.

-- **Business Record** includes a twice-daily e-newsletter, a commercial real-estate weekly, a weekly *BRIowa* for state-wide news, and a new, weekly *innovationIOWA* that highlights innovation and how it relates to businesses and communities.

-- **dsm** (copies of the slick bi-monthly were set out on our tables) includes also the e-newsletter *dsmWeekly*, a semi-monthly *dsmWealth* written by financial expert Steve Dinnen, and *LiftIOWA*, devoted to women and business, providing "news and commentary on how Iowa is moving the needle to increase women business ownership and involvement in politics and government, elevating the importance of positioning more women on boards and in leadership roles, and helping to articulate the importance of closing the gender gap."

-- **Write Brain's** services are specialized publishing (such as annual reports), branding identity, custom events, and social media management.

BPC's Web site includes the intention "to support and enrich the central Iowa business and cultural communities by providing essential knowledge, connections, and inspiration through innovative products, compelling editorials, stunning visuals, and enduring relationships."

Suzanna de Baca's conversation with us demonstrated that she's fully qualified to get that done, and you can listen to an audio recording of her conversation by clicking on the Speakers tab at our Web site, <ffbc Iowa.org>.



Photos by Gary Moore



David Wilfahrt introduces our September speaker, Suzanna de Baca.

Suzanna de Baca grew up in Huxley, Iowa, one of the daughters of a religious but liberal-leaning family where she learned devotion to the core values of diversity, equity, and inclusivity. She earned her bachelor's degree with distinction from Iowa State University and her M.B.A. from the Harvard Business School. She has more than 25 years of executive leadership at public, privately held, and not-for-profit organizations, most recently as President and CEO of Planned Parenthood of the Heartland (from the fall of 2014), and before that as vice president of wealth strategies at Ameriprise Financial, Inc., where she was responsible for overseeing the firm's retirement and wealth management strategies, including especially some initiatives to serve women, small business owners, and the LGBTQ community.

Late last year, de Baca was approached by BPC Chairman Connie Wimer, who asked her to join her management team. Suzanna took a few days to consider the offer but, as she told us, "You don't say no to Connie Wimer!" For many years a community activist, de Baca was long a volunteer with Planned Parenthood before she became its CEO, previously serving also on the boards of the Minnesota Women's Foundation and the Hennepin County Medical Center. As President of BPC, Suzanna de Baca can be reached at The Depot at Fourth, 100 4th Street, Des Moines 50309; 515/288-3336, ext. 222; suzannadebaca@bpcdm.com

Iowa's Great Unknown: Arthur Russell

By Jordan Duesenberg



This month I'm writing about a musician who is a fellow Iowan himself, Arthur Russell. He was born in Oskaloosa, Iowa, on May 21, 1951. Although Russell has found recognition today, it's unfortunate he never got to see true success in his lifetime; he died from AIDS related illness at the age of 40, on April 4, 1992. There's a good chance you've never heard of Arthur Russell. However, if you listen to Kanye West's music (especially before he started wearing MAGA hats) you may have heard some of Russell's music, as his song "Answers Me" was sampled on West's song "30 Hours" from the album *The Life of Pablo*. Truth be told, this is how I discovered Arthur Russell, but little did I know the man had a wide influence on many aspects of popular music today.

As I already said, Arthur Russell was born in Oskaloosa in 1951. He was always a talented child, playing both cello and piano, and even composing his own music. At age 18, he moved to San Francisco where he would live in a Buddhist commune and studied North Indian Classical Music as well as Western composition at two schools in the city. He would also meet and start briefly dating famous poet Allen Ginsberg, who he would also tour and play cello with while Ginsberg sang or read poetry. At the time, Russell didn't identify as gay. He would soon move to New York City to study electronic music and linguistics. That, however, ended when he became a music director of The Kitchen, a downtown avant-garde performance space known for its minimalist approach. Russell was successful in this position, but he stirred up controversy by changing the status quo by booking not just internationally known composers, but also supporting local and low-profile composers and bands outside traditional minimalistic standards. For instance, he booked both The Modern Lovers as well as the Talking Heads, which didn't sit well with some intellectuals. He believed, however, that rock and pop music could be minimalistic and arty, and he stuck with that belief.

In New York City, Arthur Russell, also started creating music himself. First, by joining a band -- The Flying Hearts, where he played keyboard (this band sometimes played with David Byrne of Talking Heads fame), but it was Russell's introduction to the disco scene in the mid to late 70s that would truly influence his life and career on a higher level. A regular at a popular gay disco, The Gallery, Russell now identified as a gay man, and was inspired to write and produce his own disco music, most famously "Kiss Me Again" under the moniker Dinosaur L (this also featured David Byrne from the Talking Heads on rhythm guitar). While this was a hit in New York City and among disco heads, it never found mainstream success. Russell would keep going, forming a disco group, Loose Joints, with the intention of creating disco's "White Album." They only were able to release three singles: "Tell You Today," "Pop Your Funk" and, most importantly, "Is It All Over My Face?" That last one was an extremely sexually-suggestive song (originally sang with a male vocalist) that proved to be extremely influential. Larry Levan, of New York City mega-club Paradise Garage, made it into a hit and it's even credited with being one of the most influential records for the formation of House music in the 80s. Highly recommended if you've never heard it.



Russell's disco career didn't continue into the 80s, after he started to get more experimental and notoriously difficult. He was well-known for leaving the majority of his music unfinished, but you could still hear the influence of the genre. He released a slew of singles throughout the decade, but only saw the release of one full album in his lifetime, *World of Echo* in 1986, which went largely unnoticed at the time but is heralded as a classic today for its experimental nature. Russell found out he was HIV positive shortly after the release of his album, and he continued to make music, largely unreleased until his death of April 4, 1992, at the age of 40. He died nearly broke and unknown outside certain artsy circles, but he left behind thousands of tapes of unreleased music that has continued to be released posthumously, showing today's world his genius.

Arthur Russell greatly influenced dance music, disco, electronic music, and experimental music. Even some of his more experimental works were precursors for newer genres like bedroom pop and lofi. He's someone who did big things in life that resulted in relative obscurity but, thankfully, is finally getting the love and recognition that he so deserves.



Once Upon a Time in Hollywood

A Film Review by Mark Turnage

Writing an autobiography is an exercise in striking an authentic narrative tone: because the book's subject is also its author, its perspective can be filtered through anything from rose-tinted glasses to sobering reflection, satirical critique, or even witty parody. "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood" is Tarantino's meta-commentary on his own films: while it can come off as self-indulgent, it's also a comedic and satirical reflection on aging and changing times.

Once Upon a Time in Hollywood is notable for its tone being a more restrained and nuanced storytelling departure from Tarantino's previous work. Leonardo DiCaprio plays Rick Dalton, a talented but fading western star of old 50's Hollywood who is struggling to find his place in 1969. Brad Pitt is his stunt double, Cliff Booth, who also had a legendary status as a stuntman until impulsive and problematic choices sunk his own career. Both men are mirror images of each other: Rick is an ostentatious diva prone to fits of sobbing self-pity over days gone by, while Cliff's unbridled machismo may net him admiration and women, but often creates more problems than it solves. These are both caricatures of Tarantino the director ("Rick") and the male characters in his prior films ("Cliff"), and together the two make a harmonious buddy-comedy duo, which the film is careful to code as masculine and platonic despite the men's closeness.

Their misadventures place them in the social spheres of both Sharon Tate (Margot Robbie), the historically ill-fated budding actress, and the Manson Family cult—Tate is Rick Dalton's neighbor in the Hollywood Hills, and Charles Manson (Damon Harriman) makes a very brief (but creepy) cameo casing the Tate residence while Sharon is home. Sharon is depicted as a bubbly, innocent person, and although Robbie doesn't get much opportunity script-wise for the character to have much depth, a scene where Sharon goes to see herself in the latest movie she's starred in, *The Wrecking Crew*, showcases her relatability and likability in her giddiness at seeing herself on the silver screen. Sharon's story arc is both commentary for and reversal of the way women are traditionally treated in Tarantino films, yet it's unfortunate more screen time wasn't dedicated to exploring her character, or this theme.

Setting up the film with this historical context early-on creates an ominous shadow over the kooky fun Rick and Cliff are having getting their grooves back and, as the story progresses, more Manson cult members slowly begin to surround the duo's activities. Yet Tarantino makes it clear that this storm cloud, while threatening, won't rain on Hollywood's parade so long as the "good ol' boys/girls" like Rick, Cliff, and Sharon are around. It isn't until the third act that the generational conflict between Rick and Cliff's can-do optimism and the Manson Family's hippie nihilism becomes explicit in two masterful scenes: an incredibly tense encounter between Cliff and the Manson Family at their ranch, and a dialogue between Manson Family cult members about why they target celebrities: a toxic mix of idolization, lust for fame, and because "Hollywood taught us how to kill." And it's here that Tarantino sets up his ultimate conflict between the optimistic, inspiring Hollywood of old, and the cynical, carnivorous Hollywood of new.

Hollywood is packed to the gills with historical atmosphere, framing Rick Dalton's career with interactions among actual Hollywood historical figures like Steve McQueen, Bruce Lee, and Roman Polanski. In true Tarantino fashion, the dialogue is windy and meandering, filled with references to classic films, but punctuated by comedic twists or a thematic breakthrough for one of the characters. It's ironic that a film can be overwhelming and meandering at the same time, yet that's exactly what **Once Upon a Time in Hollywood** is—it may not be for everyone, but that's show business. See it if you're a (longtime) Tarantino fan, film buff, or want teleported to the twilight years of the swinging late '60s.



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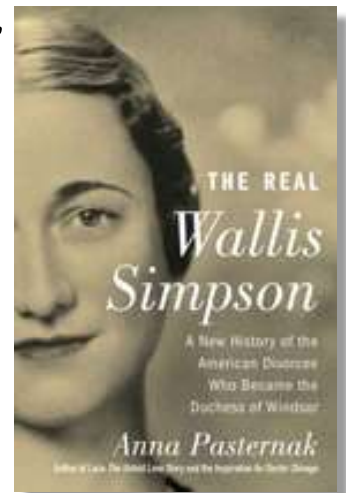
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The Real Wallis Simpson:

***A New History of the American Divorcée Who
Became the Duchess of Windsor***

By Anna Pasternak

A Book Review by Steve Person



Perhaps the most maligned woman of the twentieth century was Bessie Wallis Warfield Spencer Simpson Windsor. Author Anna Pasternak set about to assert that Wallis, Duchess of Windsor, proved to be more of a typical human being than the ogre portrayed of her by the British royal family and government after the abdication of King Edward VIII in 1936 to make her his wife.

Wallis Warfield (she dropped the Bessie early-on, thinking it sounded too much like the name for a cow) was born in Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania, June 19, 1896. Wallis's father died of tuberculosis when she was just five months old, leaving her mother to raise an only child. Wallis grew up in Baltimore, and while she and her mother lived in straitened conditions, they were fortunate that Uncle Sol, a strict southern banker, provided much needed support from time to time.

At the age of twenty, Wallis met and soon married a dashing young navy pilot, Winfield Spencer. Unfortunately, the dashing young aviator turned out to be an alcoholic and wife beater. After numerous attempts to repair the marriage, Wallis finally gained a divorce—much to the horror of her Baltimore relatives—and moved on with her life. She eventually met Ernest Simpson, an American who became a naturalized British citizen, and the couple settled in London. It was during this period that the couple met through acquaintances the young, dapper, and unmarried Edward, Prince of Wales. The prince soon became besotted with another man's wife and lavished his attention—and money and jewels—on Wallis. While she enjoyed the attentions of the prince, she remained firmly married to Ernest. When King George V died in January 1936, Edward became king. He was determined to make Wallis his wife even though such a situation was impossible at the time since the Church of England did not recognize divorce. Rather than listen to Wallis, who begged him not to abdicate, the pig-headed Edward chose voluntary abdication in order to free himself so he could marry her. The royal family and government blamed the abdication entirely on Wallis and set in motion every effort to discredit her. Edward became the Duke of Windsor after the abdication, and the couple married June 3, 1937.

In the preface to her book, Pasternak writes, "When I began my research, keen to strip away decades of grotesque caricature in an attempt to find the real Wallis, I feared that doors might close. The opposite happened: people were keen to talk with me and I found that those close to the story did not hold Wallis in contempt....Sitting in elegant drawing rooms in London, Paris, Gstaad and Marbella, interviewing those who knew Wallis, I heard the same sentiments echoed: that she was witty and diverting company; that the duke was self-absorbed and less engaging. That Wallis, possessed of perfect manners, behaved with laudable inner strength and dignity, despite the terrible slurs and insults hurled at her."

The lives of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor survived through constant slights from his mother, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth (later the Queen Mother), Edward's younger brother, King George VI who became king after the abdication, and the British aristocracy. I have read many books on the lives of these two people and find that Pasternak's book lifts the heavy veil of discrimination against Wallis, Duchess of Windsor.