

**FFBC**

First Friday News & Views

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

September 2018

Volume 23

Issue 9

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



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



R.S.V.P.

JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com

or phone (515) 288-2500

or the website
by Wednesday,
September 5.



FFBC Website:
www.ffbciowa.org



A Deal is a Deal in Plain View

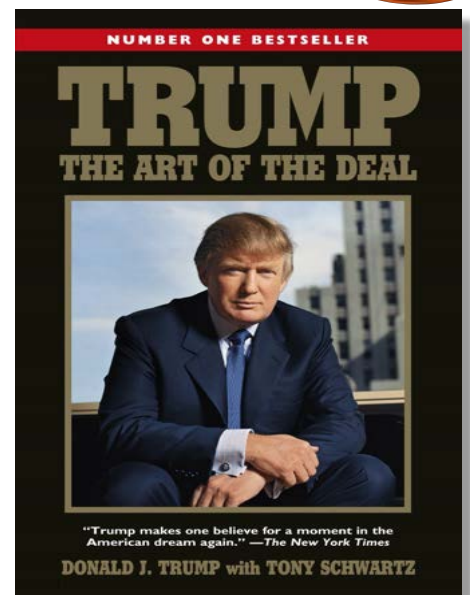
by Jonathan Wilson

I'm not making this up. We now know the agenda for the June 16, 2016, meeting in Trump Tower between top Trump campaign officials and KNOWN Russian operatives with KNOWN connections to the Russian government:

Agenda Item #1: The Russians wanted to offer "dirt" on Hillary Clinton, supposedly collected by Russian intelligence services, that could be used to help Trump's campaign. That was the "bait" used to get the meeting scheduled. The "bait" worked; we've all read Donald Trump, Jr.'s email saying that if such dirt was forthcoming, "I love it."

Agenda Item #2: Discuss Americans adopting kids from Russia (read: Discuss lifting of sanctions on Russia and Russians with close ties to Putin; it was the imposition of sanctions that had prompted Putin to ban Americans from adopting kids from Russia). No one in that meeting cared one whit about adoptions, hapless Russian orphans, or childless American couples. The Russians cared about the sanctions, period, end of sentence, drop mic. The Russians wanted the sanctions lifted, and they were willing to be helpful to the Trump election effort in the expectation that, if elected, Trump would endeavor to get sanctions lifted.

That now-admitted agenda unmistakably reveals an incriminating *quid pro quo*. It reveals a classic example of the proverbial "you-scratch-my-back-and I'll-scratch yours." That both items were on the same agenda clinches that conclusion. It was a conspiracy between the Trump campaign and Russia, each having something that the other wanted. And that's a crime, pure and simple. Actually, it's multiple crimes -- all felonies -- plus treason, the highest crime there is. [See 18 U.S. Code §371 and US Constitution Article 3, Section 3] Interesting side note: treason is the only crime defined in the U.S. Constitution and arises from someone giving aid and comfort to an "enemy" of the United States. Query whether that is why Trump has called Russia a mere "competitor," and refuses to call Russia an enemy of the United States.



[continued on page two]

["A Deal is a Deal in Plain View" / continued from page one]

But there's more. Post-election, during the transition to the Trump administration, Trump's son-in-law met in person multiple times with the Russian Ambassador to the U.S. and -- get this -- discussed lifting of sanctions and actually proposed setting up a "back-channel" line of communication between the Trump administration and Russia using Russian facilities so that the communications could take place without monitoring by U.S. intelligence services. [*Washington Post*, May 26, 2017]

But there's still more. Within days of his inauguration (in furtherance of the conspiracy that was hatched on June 16, 2016), Trump requested a road map for how sanctions against Russia could be lifted *unilaterally*. That is to say, lifting sanctions without getting or even seeking any concessions from Russia, or any change in Russian behavior that prompted the sanctions to be imposed in the first place. [*NBC News* and *Yahoo News*, June 1, 2017]

Trump must have felt that Russia had done enough already by attacking our democracy and helping him get elected President. A deal, after all, is a deal. And this deal was artfully made on June 16, 2016, and it's out there and obvious

"There are none so blind as those who refuse to see" (Jeremiah 5:21).



Mark Your Calendar

September's Speaker:

Brad Clark

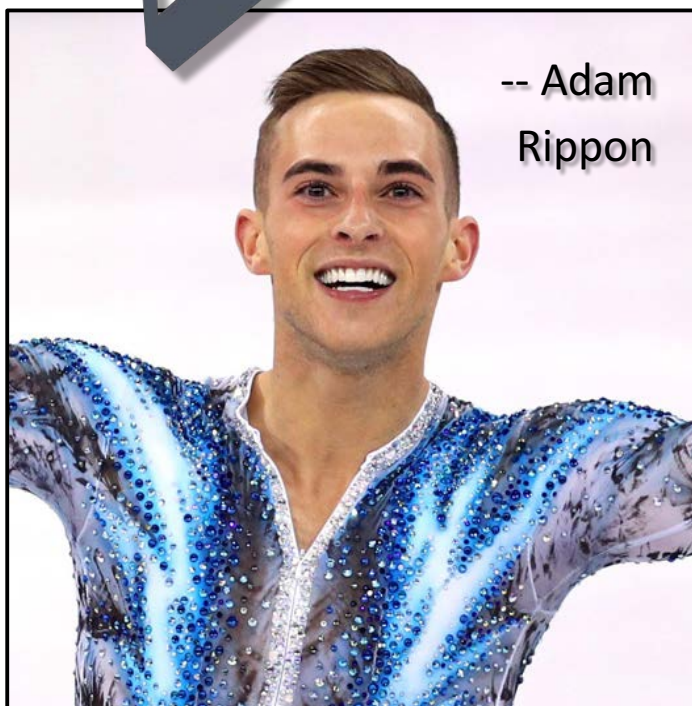


Our speaker in September will be Brad Clark, Executive Director of the Gill Foundation. The foundation is one of the nation's largest funders of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equality, having invested more than \$335 million in programs and nonprofits across the country working to advance equal rights for LGBT people. You won't want to miss. 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.

"We had gay burglars the other night. They broke in and rearranged the furniture."

-- Robin Williams

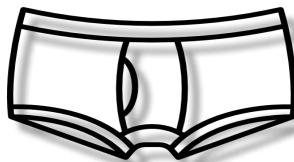
“Being gay is not something that defines me. What defines me is what my mom always taught me: to treat everyone with respect, to always be a hard worker, and to be kind.”



-- Adam Rippon



Briefs ✓ & Shorts:



Thanks to **Scott Kuknyo** for introducing our August speaker, Teree Caldwell-Johnson, President of the Des Moines Public Schools Board of Directors. Thanks 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 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 **September 17, 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.

Don't Miss the
DEADLINE!

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.

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

Tax
Deductible
Donation Processing

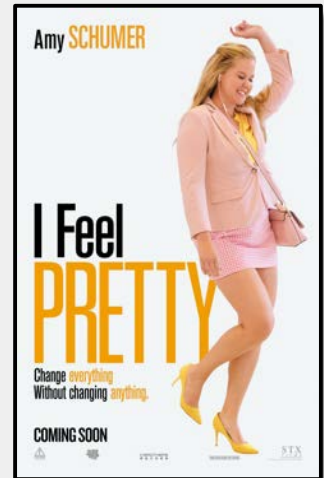


I Feel Pretty

by Jordan Duesenberg



Body
positivity
is for
all bodies.



As things continue to progress in our society, it seems like more and more I keep reading about body positivity. I recently watched Amy Schumer's new movie, *I Feel Pretty*, in which Amy Schumer plays a woman who hates her appearance which affects all facets of her life in negative ways, everything from her job, her friendships, romantic life, etc. Then Amy's character has an accident in which she hits her head and then is overcome with how beautiful she believes she has become. The character never sees what Amy's character supposedly sees, we just see Amy Schumer (who is beautiful); however, based on her character's reaction, we are to believe she thinks she looks like a supermodel. As a result, Amy becomes overconfident about everything because she believes she's supermodel-pretty and her positivity and energy become infectious. I don't have enough time to explain the movie, nor do I want to ruin anything, but the viewer walks away with the message that no matter how you look, it's how you feel about yourself that matters. I loved the movie on a personal level, as my relationship with my body has been a contentious one practically my entire life.

I was a chubby kid growing up. I wasn't extremely overweight, but you could probably guess that besides watching cartoons and playing tag, my hobbies also included eating Whoppers and Nutty Bars. Despite the fact that I played sports all year around, my diet was terrible. Honestly, I drank like five cans of pop a day (thanks Mom and Dad). But what did I know or care? I was just a little boy. I wasn't very aware of my body until I started becoming aware of other boys' bodies. The heartthrobs of my era were Freddie Prinze Jr., Ryan Phillippe, N*Sync -- you know the type -- hot twinkies with tight bodies. The boys in my class I also had secret crushes on also had tight bodies, and so started a negative relationship with my body, until I could achieve some semblance to what I found attractive. It wasn't until I was in high school that this would happen.



I joined the wrestling team in high school (which isn't as hot as it sounds), and there's a reason that wrestlers are so crazy; the conditioning is insane. Between the high intensity interval training, weightlifting, cardio, and wrestling, I not only lost a ton of weight but gained a good amount of muscle. What was also introduced to me was unhealthy dieting, all in the name of making weight. I would run with multiple layers on, sometimes with garbage bags underneath, and would often skip meals in order to make sure that I could wrestle in our meets. I never once didn't make weight. While I never developed any full-fledged eating disorders, I did learn that I could control my appearance with drastic measures if push came to shove and, oftentimes, when I would do this, I'd receive compliments and praise, which obviously felt great. But then college came around and I basically gained the "freshman fifteen" (plus about another fifteen), but I didn't care, I was busy having fun.

When I came out at the end of college, my first boyfriend's ex made a Facebook post about me that said something along the lines of "it's funny when you see your ex's new boyfriend and guess he's into fat guys now." It also got over 100 likes from people that I knew. While I should've just brushed this off, I didn't. I became obsessed with appearing skinny and threw myself into the gym constantly, basically going back to how I'd drop weight in my wrestling years. I eventually lost weight over a period of months and the attention that I got was addictive. I felt great about myself again, but only because other people were telling me that I was attractive (it didn't hurt that I felt like I got some sense of revenge for that vindictive queen who had the nerve to call me out on social media for absolutely no reason). While I don't think there's anything wrong with taking care of yourself, I do think it's wrong to feel good about yourself only because other people tell you they're attracted to you.

Even after I lost weight, I still saw myself as fat and constantly sought approval from chatting with strangers on dating apps or pictures on social media. But it was never enough because I never worked on the issue of being happy with who I was as a person. It took being in a healthy relationship, years of self-reflection and therapy, and many fluctuating weights. Eventually, I came to a place where I no longer relied on numbers on the scale to tell me how I'd feel about myself that day. I wish I could've seen *I Feel Pretty* a number of years ago to help me in the journey. I'm at least happy that other people who feel the same way can see this to help them in the process.



Mission: Impossible - Fallout

Movie Review by Mark Turnage

The challenge with long-running action franchises is building upon the original formula with each sequel without becoming a retread of the films that came before it—bonus points if you continue to keep the story cohesive. ***Mission: Impossible – Fallout*** is the sixth film in the series since 1996, and it takes hallmarks that the series is known for (zany stunt work, eye-popping set pieces, and uncertain loyalties), and makes them bigger, while honoring the groundwork set up by its predecessors.

These references function as almost blink-and-you-miss-it nods, but if you've been following the franchise from the beginning, it's refreshing to see the series finally acknowledge itself as a 20-year evolution of the same secret agent from rookie to veteran. For example, the first ***Mission: Impossible*** (1996) was a defamiliarization of spy-movie fare: Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise) was a rookie in way over his head, picking up the pieces of a failed mission that killed most of his team and framed him as a traitor. This film also established Ving Rhames as a recurring support character, and the rapport he and Cruise have in their scenes together in ***Fallout*** is that of buddy combat veterans. The opening of Hunt's sixth impossible mission eerily echoes that of his first, as well as his first underworld contact -- the daughter of the arms dealer he matched wits with twenty years prior. Vanessa Kirby's White Widow is an absolute treat to watch every time she's on screen, and nails Vanessa Redgrave's cat-and-mouse dangerous coyness and mannerisms from twenty years prior.

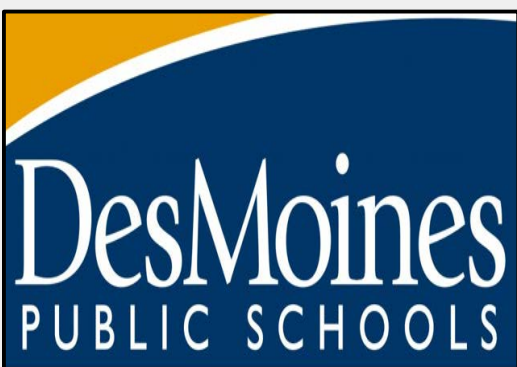
Yet as much as there is familiar territory, there's a freshness that says this series enjoys reinventing itself. Early in the movie, we meet uneasy ally and CIA assassin August Walker (Henry Cavill), and he's not just mustachioed eye candy; he's a shoot first, ask questions later type of agent. He's equally skilled as Hunt but far more ruthless, as exemplified by a visually stunning (and cruisey!) three-way men's bathroom fight that's brutal and tightly shot. The ideological conflict between Walker's cold cynicism and Hunt's loyal optimism is that of diverging political outlooks: Walker's "whatever it takes to win" and Hunt's "leave no man behind." It's a subtle but politically relevant take that transcends partisanship and digs into what's conscionable—the safety of the many versus the safety of family. It's a theme that's revisited in the finale by the return of Hunt's ex-wife from the third film and, even if her appearance feels a little like "villain contrivance," it allows the series to conclude an arc that has had lingering emotional consequences for Ethan Hunt. The secondary theme of "strength is only achieved through tragedy" explored by the villains is much flimsier, and if there's a glaring weak spot in this film, it's the one-dimensional villains.

The amount of stunts in this film **is** zany, ranging from a botched HALO jump over the Grand Palais in Paris to a multi-vehicle chase sequence that features Cruise and his cohorts in cars, on motorcycles, and finally on foot evading the French police. And, the finale is a point-of-view helicopter pursuit where Hunt's only option is to ram his enemy out of the sky. Ordinarily, with the advances of computer-generated imagery in film, the impossible can seem unimpressive.

Yet the ***Mission: Impossible*** series has always had my respect for its use of practical stunt work over CGI as much as possible. Its star is pushing 60 and is **actually** jumping out of planes, flying helicopters, and jumping off buildings. Love him or hate him, Cruise's work as a stuntman is impressive (or crazy).

See it, and enjoy a summer blockbuster that's proving there's more impossible missions to be had.





A School Board in Good Hands

by Bruce Carr



Our guest speaker on Friday morning, August 3, 2018, was Teree Caldwell-Johnson, a member of the Des Moines School Board since 2006 and now, as the board's chair, serving in what she called her "fourth and final" term. She gave us a swift, succinct, and fascinating account of the "State of the School System" as it has developed during her 12 years as a member, outlining demographics, a couple of current issues (school safety and school/community members born outside the US), some challenges, and several points of pride.

Des Moines is Iowa's largest and most diverse school system, Teree noted, with some 33,000 students (as of October 2017): 39% are Anglo, 26% Hispanic, 19% African American, 8% Asian, and 6% multi-racial. Over 73% qualify for free and reduced-price meals, and 21% are English Language Learners; over 100 different languages are spoken in the homes of Des Moines students. On the issue of keeping schools safe, she reported that, of the system's 64 buildings, 55 have single, controlled entrances. Every classroom is now fitted with intruder locks which cannot be opened from the hallway. There are 1,037 security cameras running throughout the system, she said, and eight full-time police officers in the buildings. Teree further expressed her great pride in the stand which the board took a year ago (February 2017) officially declaring itself a Sanctuary District and establishing written protocols for the physical protection of those (Dreamers, for instance, and those with DACA deferments) who might be subject to attention from officers of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). (Teree noted that there are 4,000 students in our system who were born outside the US – 200 of these from countries which are included in the so-called "Muslim" travel ban.)

[continued on page seven]

Born in Salina, Kansas, Teree Caldwell earned her B.A. in English from Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia (America's oldest private historically black liberal arts college for women) and a master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Kansas in Lawrence; she took further post-graduate studies at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania. Embarking on a career of increasingly responsible government positions across the United States, Teree Caldwell spent time in San Diego, California, and Austin, Texas – and with the City of Ames, Iowa, where (she told me) she met "the love of her life" who convinced her to return to the Midwest. Appointed executive director of the Metro Waste Authority in Des Moines in 1988, she served in that position until 1996, when she was appointed Polk County Manager, a post she held until 2003. In April 2004, she was appointed CEO for Oakridge Neighborhood and Oakridge Neighborhood Services – Des Moines' most diverse non-profit housing and human services community – where she is still CEO 14 years later.

Teree Caldwell-Johnson was first elected to the Des Moines School Board in 2006, and reelected in 2009, 2013, and 2017; she currently serves as chair of the school board. Among the other organizations on whose board she serves are the National Civic League, the Mid-Iowa Health Foundation, the Polk County Housing Trust Fund, Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, The Directors Council, the University of Kansas College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Advisory Board, Greater Des Moines Community Foundation, and the Spelman College Museum Board. In addition, Teree is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, Jack and Jill of America, and The Links, Incorporated.

She has received dozens of awards for her volunteering, including the Faith and Freedom Community Leader Award (2018), the A. Arthur Davis Distinguished Community Leadership Award (2017), the President's MLK Drum Major for Service Lifetime Volunteer Award (2014), the Iowa African American Museum's History Maker (2010), the Business Publications Women of Influence (2002), the Black Ministerial Alliance Leadership Award (2002), the Business Record Best Female Business Leader (2001), and the YWCA Woman of Achievement (1999).

Teree and her husband, Vernon, a retired non-profit executive, live on Des Moines' south side and are the parents of two adult sons, Baley and Baxtyr, both proud graduates of Lincoln High School. She can be reached at tcaldwell-johnson@oakridgeneighborhood.org or at teree.caldwell-johnson@dmschools.org



*Photo
by
Gary
Moore*

Caldwell-Johnson identified the budget as her biggest concern going forward. It's now hovering annually around one-half billion dollars (\$500,000,000). The state legislature is a major obstacle here, with its wreaking havoc on the unions' bargaining issues, its outdated funding formulas, and its favors given to non-public education. ("Every dollar that goes to home-schooling [and private schools] is a dollar less for our students," she said.) Another result of declining revenues is the dwindling of teacher pools, as teaching becomes a less and less desirable profession for young college grads, especially people of color.



Photo by Gary Moore

Still, there is much to be proud of, Teree reminded us, with athletic successes (Hoover Huskies softball), academic triumphs (Merrill Middle School mock trial victories), financial strength (the Des Moines Schools have no general obligation debt, thanks to sales-tax pennies). She is proud of the system's successful free-tuition master's-degree program for beginning teachers who agree to multi-year contracts. And, the Central Academy A.P. programs and Central Campus technical and practical programs are, simply, "jewels of the system," she said, as good as the best in the nation.

You can hear, or re-hear, a complete audio recording of Teree Caldwell-Johnson's presentation, and the Q&A which followed, by going to our Website, <ffbc.iowa.org>, and clicking on "Speakers".

"The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those who speak it."

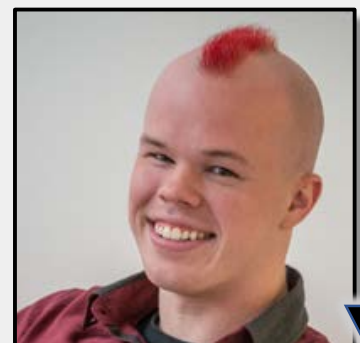
George Orwell

Mark Your Calendars!

Future FFBC Speakers Announced:

October: Samuel Brinton

(Head of Advocacy and Government Affairs for the Trevor Project)





Art of the Deal: The Sequel

“Here’s a BIG ball in exchange for your two little ones.”

Compliments of Jonathan

Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again

A Movie Review by Jonathan Wilson

I don’t do movie reviews. In that regard, I lack skills even remotely comparable to our regular reviewer, Mark Turnage. I can, however, report on an experience.



I saw the remade movie, *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again*, at the Flix Brewhouse Theater in Merle Hay Mall. It was a thoroughly enjoyable experience. The movie itself was just plain fun, starting with the ABBA musical hits that I love. It featured some familiar celebrities, including Cher, who I consider peerless. It was colorful and energetic. It was fast-moving. I didn’t want it to end.

To make the enjoyable experience complete, however -- get this -- for those of you who have not yet been to this venue, patrons sit on comfortable, reclining seats. Each patron is served food and drink throughout the performance, and both were reasonably tasty.

The only thing they didn’t provide was a catheter and colostomy. So, go ahead of time so your attendance won’t be interrupted, even for a moment. Enjoy!! [You can see why I don’t do movie reviews.]



Buying a New Car

by John Schmacker

I can remember what my dad went through once he had decided it was time for a new car. It involved visits to showrooms and used car lots, pouring over slick sales brochures, talking with others who owned cars that interested him. He kicked tires, inspected under the hoods, and wanted just the right exterior color. Once his new car lust had kicked in, the process would occupy him for months.

Last week I bought a gently used car on the Internet. Sight unseen. How this world has changed since the mid-century days when my dad did his due diligence! Sure, new car lust hits us these days, just as it has since Henry Ford replaced his Model T with the Model A and offered something besides black. But these days we can sit at home and download new car porn as easily as we can download the real thing. CarGuru is happy to indulge our lust. Since I began this process, their ads appear on every page I open on the Internet, dangling seductive photos of available cars that my prior searches tell them will interest me.



So I bought this car. A 2011 BMW 535i. This seven-year-old Beamer will replace my twenty-year-old BMW 328i, a car which I have driven and loved for fifteen years. We have been through a lot together, but new car lust does not care about being okay with the perfectly good car one already has.

Well, maybe not perfect by today's standards. She had picked up a few minor scars and signs of wear, just as I have. I ride in my friends' cars and see backup cameras, navigation systems, Bluetooth, and CD slots. My old Beamer had none of those. Just a slot to load a cassette tape. That betrays the old girl's vintage. I gave her up with a lump in my throat, remembering how good she has been to me, despite some of her expensive needs.

These days, not many drivers are interested in having a manual transmission, but that was a requirement for any car I would consider. That may make me seem old-fashioned, but that doesn't matter; I will have me my manual transmission.

So, I finally found a decent BMW with a 6-speed manual transmission. The photos looked great, and the published specs seemed just right for me. But it was in Chicago. I ignored the voice of my long-deceased father, advising me from somewhere in the back of my head, and decided to buy the thing.

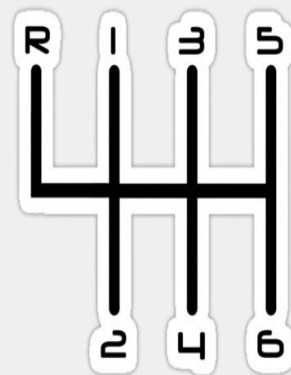
The plan for picking up my new Beamer seemed simple enough: rent a car, drive to Chicago, stay the night, drive the new car home the next day. I reserved a rental car and a hotel room, packed an overnight bag and, on the appointed Friday morning, went to the Des Moines airport to pick up my rental car.

Did you know that car rental companies no longer accept debit cards? I sure didn't. Since I don't own a credit card, I couldn't rent the damn car. None of my plan was going to work. I called Uber for a ride home, canceled the hotel, booked a 7:30 A.M. flight to Chicago Midway for the next morning and, by the way, applied for a credit card. I will spare you the details of that Saturday, except for the 4:30 A.M. alarm, the layover and change of planes in Saint Louis, the 45-mile Uber trip to the dealership, handing over a cashier's check, meeting my new love for the first time, and arriving back home by 8:00 P.M. A very long day. Cruising homeward on an Illinois freeway, I three times looked at the speedometer to discover I was doing 110 mph. The car wasn't even breathing hard. I could get into real trouble with this car. Once in Iowa, I switched on the cruise control and committed only moderate speeding.

I often experience some buyer's remorse after any expensive purchase, even when the purchase eventually proves to be the right choice. While deleting the addresses the previous owner had stored in the navigation system, I noticed that they were all addresses in Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas. My new car was a Southern bell! Soon after that I noticed that the car is not equipped with seat warmers. I'm going to miss that next January, but who would have needed those in Mississippi?

So, the new Beamer and I are learning to get along with each other and getting to know each other's quirks. I do believe that this affair is going to work out. I wish it were this easy with men.

Now I wonder how long it will be until the CarGuru ads quit showing up?



CarGurus

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Fasten Your Life Jackets

A Book Review by Steve Person of
Simon Louvish's Hollywood biography,
Mae West: It Ain't No Sin

The earliest recorded instance of the common noun, "Mae West," to refer to the life preserver that British naval fliers wore during World War II, occurred on January 11, 1940, in a BBC publication entitled ***The Listener***. The Hollywood star was more than pleased by the use of her name that celebrated a part of her anatomy designed to save lives.

Simon Louvish based his extensive 2018 biography of Mae West on recently donated archives to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles. Says Louvish, "Long known for scorning the night-spots, cabarets, and clubs where scandal was brewed and decanted, eschewing the Hollywood or Broadway gala premieres apart from her own productions, Mae West had an unguilty secret: She stayed home, night after night, and endlessly wrote, learning her craft by a slow painstaking process of trial and error, redrafting and recycling notions and themes."

Mae West was born August 17, 1893, in Brooklyn, New York, a date she would alter by a number of years when she reached Hollywood in the early 1930s. Although she would have denied it at the time, Mae West became a superstar after her fortieth birthday. Her earliest successes occurred in the beginning of the twentieth century in the rather tacky theatre medium of burlesque. From there she moved into vaudeville and later became famous for her 1926 play, ***Sex***. The New York police raided the theatre and arrested Mae on April 19, 1927. She received a sentence of ten days in jail and a fine of \$500. Of course, all this did was raise her profile as a writer and actress. Her next play, entitled ***The Drag***, explored the world of homosexuality and also resulted in her being jailed and fined. Her subsequent vehicle was ***Diamond Lil***, a role she would reprise in various reincarnations time and again during her career.

Upon her arrival in Hollywood, Mae immediately became the object of scorn of the newly created Hays Office, a sort of self-governing censorship apparatus of the Hollywood moguls intent on improving the morals of the motion pictures they produced. The Hays Office wielded tremendous power, and Mae constantly was forced to rewrite dialogue in order to tone down her use of double entendres. Told she could not make a movie of ***Diamond Lil***, she rewrote it under the title of ***She Done Him Wrong***. The screenplay followed closely the plot of her Lil character and included the first starring role for Cary Grant. Regardless of what the Hays Office did, the public ate up everything Mae presented and, by 1934, she was the highest paid performer in the United States with a reported income of \$399,166.

With the advent of the Second World War, Mae's brand of motion pictures was fading. She reinvented herself in various incarnations, including Las Vegas stage shows, radio and television appearances (including an episode of the talking horse show, ***Mr. Ed!***). Her final appearances in the movies included a featured role in ***Myra Breckenridge***, Gore Vidal's controversial story of transsexual Myron becoming Myra. If you haven't seen it, do. It is classic piece of trashy Hollywood camp.

