

First Friday News & Views

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

September 2020

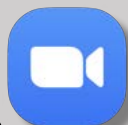
Volume 25

Issue 9

The next FFBC meeting is
Friday, September 4,
2020
7:00 a.m.



FFBC Meeting Location:
ZOOM!



SEPTEMBER MEETING
Current
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FFBC Website:
www.ffbciaowa.org



Taking a Knee

by Jonathan Wilson

It didn't take long for folks on social media to post pictures juxtaposing Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, with his knee firmly planted on the neck of an African-American man for a *long time* while the world saw and heard him pleading for his life, and of African-American pro football player Colin Kaepernick who knelt during the playing of the National Anthem with the result that he has been demonized and unable to advance his pro football career.

Those images warrant some serious reflection. On the one hand, you have taking a lethal knee to the neck of an African-American man from a white police officer charged with the responsibility of protecting and defending all citizens of the United States of America. On the other hand, you have an African American taking a career-ending knee in answer to the question that ends our National Anthem, "Oh say does that star-spangled banner yet wave o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?"

Too many don't bother to listen, even to themselves, singing with gusto that concluding question. Is it any wonder that the answer may be different from one citizen to another? African Americans? Hispanic American? Asian Americans? Native Americans? Members of the LGBTQ community? And, in a country that has a Constitution that purportedly guarantees freedom of expression to its citizens, don't we all have an empathetic responsibility to consider that some of us may have a different life experience in answer to that question? Don't we need constantly to consider our strengths as a nation *and* our shortcomings? Unfortunately, Kaepernick has been viciously attacked by many ignorant people, including the President of the United States, for his honest answer to that question because of his supposed disrespect for the anthem and/or flag.

It seems to me that Kaepernick took a knee to draw attention to the plight of African Americans among us that is sadly exemplified by what happened to George Floyd in a gutter on a street in Minneapolis at the knee of an indifferent white police officer. What happened to Floyd is just one example. The disturbing video has become a metaphor. Other examples are legion thanks to police body cams and



[continued on page 2]

["Taking a Knee" continued from page 1]

video captured by third parties that trump whitewashed written law enforcement incident or arrest reports. African-American fellow citizens, and other citizens of color, have a right to be free from racially motivated, pretextual stops; freedom from disrespectful interactions with law enforcement authorities; freedom from police over-reacting in an arrest situation; freedom from discriminatory treatment in our justice system; and freedom from police-administered, homicidal brutality. If you are Caucasian and, because of nothing more than the pigmentation of your skin, you and others like you did not enjoy those freedoms, how would you answer the question that ends our National Anthem? Really -- would you dutifully place your hand over your heart and feign unjustified, patriotic loyalty to the flag and anthem in order to avoid offending the sensibilities of beneficiaries of the systemic oppression that has gone on unabated, and even government-sanctioned, for literally centuries?

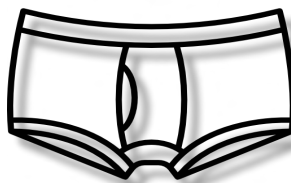
What would George Floyd answer to the oft repeated question, "Oh say does that star-spangled banner yet wave o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?" Oh, that's right, the question for him is moot -- he's dead. So, it's left to each of the rest of us, empathetically, to answer it for him, and to do something about it. Is it possible, even probable, that Colin Kaepernick was answering the question for George Floyd in advance and, now, in absentia?

The answer will be determined by whether you'd be willing to take a lethal knee on an African-American man's neck, or take a knee in an empathetic answer to the National Anthem.

Those are the only two options you have for an answer. Hint: those who are silent in the face of oppression are, by God, assigned to the side of the oppressor (paraphrasing Nobel Peace Prize recipient Elie Wiesel).

Because light travels faster than sound, some people appear bright until you hear them speak.

Briefs & Shorts:



Thanks to **David Cotton** for introducing our August speaker, **Tim Thompson**, speaking about the ManKind Pride project. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter production editor. Thanks to **David Cotton** and **Ryan Weidner** for their work as our technology gurus. Thanks to **Nicholas Williams** for managing our website. Thanks to **Joe Raetz** for keeping up-to-date the FFBC Resources page on the website. *Thanks to all our contributors to the 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.



United Way



Thanks also to all those **Amazon shoppers** who designate FFBC as the beneficiary when shopping **smile.amazon.com**. Doing your Amazon shopping using **smile.amazon.com** means that a small contribution to FFBC will be made with every purchase. Proverbial, found money.

Our fundraising efforts are ongoing to fund our scholarship program. To date we have raised over **\$400,000** for scholarships that are awarded to Iowa high school seniors who have done remarkable, courageous things to reduce homophobia and teach about LGBTQ issues in their schools and communities. Please consider a contribution on-line or by sending a check.

The next copy deadline for the FFBC newsletter will be **September 14, 2020**. 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!

Consider a **tax-deductible contribution** to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax-exempt testamentary gift, or both. Our first legacy gift to the FFBC scholarship program came from **Cliff Paulsen** who passed away last year, to the tune of over **\$67,000!** Contact Jonathan Wilson for details about legacy giving.

**COMING
SOON**

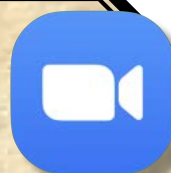
**Thank
You!**

We will be transitioning soon to a new data-based system for meeting reminders, RSVPs, and on-line payment options for dues. This should make these activities much more convenient and efficient, and much less labor intensive. There is some cost associated with setting it up and operating the new systems. **Those costs are being underwritten by FFBC members Brad Holland, Joe Raetz, and Ascendant Wealth Management Group, a private wealth advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC.**

FFBC



September Virtual Meeting



There will be a virtual meeting using ZOOM in September. The announcement with the Zoom login information will be circulated on-line. Make sure we have your current email address so you don't miss out on future announcements. You can contact David Cotton for assistance figuring out how to participate if you need that personal assistance.

zoom



David Cotton's employer, Aureon <https://www.aureon.com/>, made a \$3,000 donation to the FFBC scholarship program as part of their Aureon Charity Grant Program. David Cotton is the Chief Technical Officer and Chief Information Officer for Aureon.

September



Speaker

**Ambassador
(ret.)**

**Luis C.
de Baca**

Ambassador (ret.) Luis C. de Baca coordinated U.S. government activities in the global fight against contemporary forms of slavery as head of the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons during the Obama Administration. Previously, in the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, he was one of the United States' most decorated federal prosecutors, investigating and prosecuting dozens of human trafficking cases involving over six hundred victims. He is currently Senior Fellow in Modern Slavery at Yale University's Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition. Ambassador de Baca is a proud Central Iowa Latino, having grown up on a cattle operation in Huxley, Iowa, where he was active in 4-H, theater, and sports before attending Iowa State University and the Michigan Law School.

You won't want to miss and, since the meeting is virtual, there's no reason why you should not be able to participate.

You are also encouraged to invite some of your friends to attend virtually -- simply share the participation instructions!



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Warrior Training

by Bruce Carr

ManKindProject®

Our guest speaker on Friday morning, August 7, 2020, was Tim Thompson, a public relations executive who spoke to us from his home in Nebraska via ZOOM. Tim is a veteran of and advocate for a LGBTQ program of personal growth called New Warrior Training Adventure (NWTA) Weekend, which provides “a gateway to discovering and integrating your authentic masculine power.”

The Weekend, Tim told us, is a creation of ManKind Project (MKP), a global network of nonprofit organizations focused on male initiation, self-awareness, and personal growth. As outlined on their webpage, “MKP creates a world where men act on their individual and shared responsibility for the future of humanity by initiating and supporting men on a path of emotional maturity, spiritual awareness, and deepening community.”

“The New Warrior Training Adventure weekend is a real-time hero’s journey, and the challenge of a lifetime for many men. This is not a retreat, a conference, or a workshop. We invite men to join us for a safe, cutting edge sex-, alcohol-, and drug-free life-changing experience, 48 hours to look at your life without distractions. (Though all NWTA weekends are open to all men, some choose our LGBTQ-focused NWTAs. The staff on this special weekend is comprised mostly of LGBTQ men.)

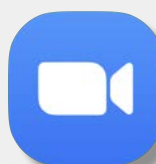
“The Weekend usually lasts from 5 p.m. Friday until 5 p.m. Sunday.

“You’ll get more than you’re willing to hope for: purpose, passion, vibrancy, joy, healing, connection to self, new energy, clarity, power, freedom, understanding, brotherhood, and trust. Over 59,000 men have now taken this journey, and every man’s experience has been unique.

“The cost is between \$650 and \$750; this includes all accommodations, meals, and materials. Financial assistance and payment plans are often available.

“The Weekend is run by ManKind Project International, a 35-year-old nonprofit organization with a proven track-record of helping men grow, flourish, and build community. We want your life to be ALL that you want it to be. We want you to be healthy in mind, body, and spirit, to feel valuable and powerful as a mature man in the world. We want a culture that is safe, supportive and vibrant for our partners, families, chosen families, kids and grand-kids. If you want that too, then take this to heart – this training will have a profound impact on you and all those you care about.”

Tim spoke with particular passion of the intense friendships he has formed since his initiation weekend; men from all over the country who like him have grown from the Weekend experience and who keep in touch. ***If you click on the Speakers tab at our Web site, <ffbc Iowa.org>, you can listen to a complete audio recording of Tim Thompson’s remarks, and of the Q&A which followed.***



Meeting
conducted
via Zoom



Tim Thompson spent his teen years in Salt Lake City, not the most ideal place to be an adolescent discovering his gay self. He encountered AA 12-step programs before he was twenty, and eventually was led to the ManKind program. He has identified as a New Warrior since September 2010. His account of his first Weekend and its results reveals the essential power of the program:

“My whole life I felt different from men and women...like I didn’t fit in anywhere. Even as I came into acceptance with being gay, I still was plagued by ‘stories’ I told myself which caused me to constantly police my actions, feelings, and authenticity. The result left me surrounded by hundreds of people who really didn’t know ‘Tim,’ and I was alone, depressed, and planning my relapse.

“A dear friend, who has always loved me for who I was, suggested ManKind Project. It only took me a couple of years[!] to gain the nerve to sign up. My deeper truth is: I doubt I would have seen another year if I didn’t do something different.

“I arrived terrified -- and from the minute I stepped onto the campsite, my comfort zone was challenged and I felt support. The knowledge and awareness I gained over that three-day weekend was invaluable. All the therapy, all the self-affirming conversations I had in my head paled in comparison to the amount of self-esteem and integrity I gained there.

“I’ve staffed a few weekends since that first time, and I walk into camp a proud, gay man with 45 years of life experience, 24 years of recovery, and a clear understanding of the man I want to become -- and the courage and dedication to become that man. I no longer feel like I need to police my actions, nor place myself second to straight people.

“I am a loving, confident, authentic gay man at last.”

Tim Thompson lives with his husband in Omaha, and can be reached at (402) 210-5804.

SuperQueero: The History of LGBTQ+ Superheroes & Supervillains

By Jordan Duesenberg

(This article originally appeared in my blog *Queerview Mirror* which you can check out at www.queerview-mirror.com)



I've loved superheroes since I was a little kid watching cartoons in the '90s like *Batman: The Animated Series*, *Spider-Man*, and my personal favorite, *X-Men*. I used to beg my mom to take me to the comic book store every week, and I'd blow all my money on whatever comics my allowance afforded me and whatever caught my attention most that day. My favorites were anything *X-Men* and *Batman*. I, of course, loved superheroes for the action and fantastical storylines, but under the surface, I think superheroes always meant a little more to me, and I'm guessing a lot of LGBTQ+ individuals as well. For one, superheroes and supervillains in some cases, have or had **secret identities**. They have their hero/villain identities that are either celebrated or feared, that allows them to carry out their every whim and fantasy, and then they have their everyday alter egos (their "day drag" if you will) that makes them shrink back into what society expects of them and what keeps them safe and under the radar. Sound familiar? Ok, and on a more superficial level, superheroes allowed me to appreciate the male figure in a way that nobody (including myself) would suspect was gay. It took me quite some time to come to terms with my sexuality but, let me tell you, it took me no time at all to know I really, really liked the way that Cyclops's butt and biceps looked in his blue *X-Men* uniform!

Within the last decade, the amount of LGBTQ+ representation with superheroes & supervillains has increased tenfold. Although I think most of us agree, things could always be better; I still got to thinking, exactly how did we even get to this point? For the purpose of this article, I'm only going to be focusing on superheroes/supervillains from comic books as well as television and film inspired by comic books. Also, I'm mainly going to be focusing on mainstream comic book companies, namely DC and Marvel.

Superheroes became big business in the late 1930s. Superman made his debut in 1938, Batman less than a year later, both Wonder Woman and Captain America followed in 1941, and hundreds upon thousands of beloved heroes and villains followed throughout the years. These characters were instantly popular but especially with the youth. In fact, it wasn't just superhero comics that were wildly successful, but comics of all genres, such as westerns, horror, romance, war stories, etc. Comics could surpass the limitations of radio and were able to broach subjects that the film industry wasn't able to at the time. You see, the film industry, although extremely popular, had been basically neutered by the Motion Picture Production Code, which was essentially a moral doctrine that forbade motion pictures from doing anything interesting from 1934 – 1968. Therefore, comic books were a beacon of light for those looking for creativity and representation of life as it actually was or could be, not some bundled up propaganda that would be better suited for an episode of *Leave it to Beaver*.

While there were no outwardly LGBTQ+ characters or superheroes among mainstream comics during this time, LGBTQ+ readers looked deeper and below the surface to see themselves represented and honestly, it wasn't too hard to find. In "The History of the Gay Subtext of Batman and Robin," writer Glen Weldon explains: "as a visual medium filled with silent cues like body language and background detail, superhero comics have proven a particularly fertile vector for gay readings over the years. Images can assert layers of unspoken meanings that mere words can never conjure."

LGBTQ+ readers looked at Batman's relationship with Robin (the first Robin a.k.a. Dick Grayson) which was pretty damn gay at moments and determined there was action happening between the heroes apart from just fighting crime. Readers also read between the lines while looking at a hero like Wonder Woman, who was/is a powerful, independent, feminist icon and hero, who hailed from an island exclusively populated by women! Like Kristin Wiig from *Bridesmaids* says: "LESBIAN!!!! We were all thinking it!"

Of course, it wasn't just LGBTQ+ readers that took notice of such things. A German psychologist by the name of Dr. Frederic Wertham definitely noticed these as well. Wertham came to the conclusion that comic books were corrupting the youth of the era which inspired him to write a book called *The Seduction of the Innocent* which, in my opinion, is a title better suited for a B horror film or softcore porn. Unfortunately, we weren't so lucky, and it was a book that documented all sorts of examples of how comics were supposedly causing juvenile delinquency. Shortly after the publication, he spoke to the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency (yeah that was a real thing). As a result, the comics industry, in panic, formed the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) and created the Comics Code Authority (commonly known as the Code) which, much like the film industry's Motion Picture Production Code, was a self-policing moral guide on what mainstream comics could and couldn't post. Without the Code's seal of approval, no distributor of comics would touch them, so it was imperative that writers obeyed.

There were a lot of bogus rules inside the Comics Code that would completely alter the course of comics history for quite some time, but for the purpose of this article, I'm going to focus on the three rules that essentially eliminated anything LGBTQ+:

- Illicit sex relations are neither to be hinted at nor portrayed. Violent love scenes as well as sexual abnormalities are unacceptable.
- The treatment of love-romance stories shall emphasize the value of home and the sanctity of marriage.
- Sex perversion or any inference to same is strictly forbidden.

It didn't take long for Batwoman to show up as a love interest for Batman and Batgirl (Batwoman's niece, how convenient!) for Robin, to take the heat off of them. Fun fact, they would also kill off Alfred in the early 60s to bring in Robin's Aunt Harriet to live with them because three men living together was too suspicious! Wonder Woman was also a casualty of the Code! According to writer Joe Sergi: "[Wonder Woman became] a caricature of her former self. She had transformed into a weak figure with no personality or wit. Denied her erotic and feminist history, she became a virginal, domesticated figure whose goal of fighting injustice was abandoned for marriage and shopping. Once strong and independent, Wonder Woman became more concerned with getting Steve Trevor...to the altar."

[continued on page 6]

Coronavirus Response/Recovery

by Supervisor Matt McCoy, Polk County, 5th District

These past months have been challenging for Polk County as we all collectively had to adapt to what's often referred to as the "new normal." This is true for how the county conducts business and how we individually live our daily lives. At Polk County, we worked quickly and decisively to ensure the safety of employees and the general public who rely on the services we provide. Initially, that meant instituting work-from-home policies where applicable and closing our buildings to the general public in an effort to slow the spread of the virus.



We are proud of the initial **response** to COVID-19 that Polk County implemented in the immediate days of the crisis. We quickly activated our Emergency Operations Center as a base for operations and dissemination of information. Our teams began collecting and distributing necessary supplies for front-line workers. We opened a shelter at the State Fairgrounds for the less fortunate such as any of the homeless population that may be impacted by COVID-19. And we, along with community partners, have created a grant program to help assist small businesses within Polk County.

As cases began to surge in July, all five members of the Polk County Board of Supervisors sent a joint letter to Governor Kim Reynolds demanding that she allow local communities to decide on a mask mandate. The Governor's office has yet to respond to our request. The Iowa Attorney General's Office has concluded that the governor's proclamation usurped local control and the Polk County Attorney's Office concurred that a countywide mask mandate could not be enforceable. I have continued to press the governor on allowing local governments to make their own decisions on what's best for their communities. The Board of Supervisors and the Polk County Public Health Department have teamed up to bring continued public awareness to mask wearing. Throughout the months of August and September, we have launched a campaign encouraging Central Iowans to **#MaskUpDSM**. This multi-platform campaign is a large but important undertaking. This is especially true as school resumes.

While the late July surge in COVID-19 cases has appeared to plateau for the time being, we are anticipating another spike in cases as schools join bars, restaurants, and employers who have already reopened their doors. Accordingly, the Polk County Health Department is working closely with school districts to offer "best practices" for schools and parents alike for the return-to-learn effort.

Responding to this challenge, we have also been focused on our **recovery** from COVID-19 in the hopes that cases of COVID remain neutral or decline. This list of challenges is long and, frankly, daunting. Our immediate focus includes:

- * **Reopening county facilities when possible with new safety measures.**
- * **Refocusing our services to those immediate human service needs for our most vulnerable populations.**
- * **Working with State and Federal partners to fund COVID -related costs incurred during the shutdown.**



I wish this could be as simple as flipping a switch, and we would go back to how things were at the start of 2020. Unfortunately, this is going to be a long, slow, and sometimes painful recovery. Heading into the fall, you must get your flu shot, especially those who are at higher risk. If you contract COVID-19 and also have the flu, there's evidence that it doubles the chances of dying. Having both also makes recovery much more difficult. If you get the flu shot as early as August, you may need a booster in three to four months. Those over the age of 50 should get the shingles vaccine, and those over 65 should get shots to prevent pneumonia, along with any other doctor-recommended vaccines and shots. Taking these preventative measures will help protect you as sicknesses become more prevalent. It's also important to step up and care for each other by wearing masks and social distancing when possible. We must continue to do our part to control the spread in Iowa's largest county.

["SuperQueero" continued from page 5]

What was once known as the Golden Age of Comics had officially come to a close, and what once pushed the limits of creativity but also the status quo, was now basically propaganda directed solely at children. As a result, comics became less interesting and suffered. Unfortunately, the Code stuck around for quite some time too, though it would go through a number of alterations. The first official revision was in 1971 which loosened a number of its strictest rules, at least surrounding violence and the depiction of supernatural beings, but it wouldn't be until 1989 that LGBTQ+ representation was fully allowed. That's not to say that writers didn't try, they just had to do it in a way that got around the Code.

Take a DC comics teenage superhero known as Element Lad who became a member of the Legion of Super Heroes and was first introduced in the early '60s. He made a number of references to being awkward with women and, in one storyline involving time travel, readers were introduced to an older, adult, and (most importantly) unmarried version of the character. Although that might seem like somewhat of a stretch for modern day readers, queer readers of the era jumped all over this as proof that Element Lad was one of them, so much so, that DC eventually gave him a girlfriend to quiet down the rumors.

You might have noticed that all of my references so far have been about DC comics. That's not by accident. You see, Marvel was even stricter when it came to LGBTQ+ representation. This would be especially true when Marvel's Editor-in-Chief, Jim Shooter, took over in 1978-1988. Shooter reportedly had a "no gays" policy; characters couldn't officially come out as LGBTQ+ as a result of that. The policy was also added to the strict rules of the Code. Oddly enough, it would be Shooter himself that would provide Marvel's first clear LGBTQ+ representation; however, it wasn't a superhero or supervillain he'd do it with. In 1980's *Rampaging Hulk* #23, Bruce Banner almost gets sexually assaulted by two clearly gay men in a ridiculous story at a YMCA shower. In the story, Bruce Banner, terrified and unable to turn into The Hulk during the altercation, barely escapes the men by telling them that he is, in fact, Bruce Banner/The Hulk. Once safely away, he's so mortified and disgusted by what almost happened, that he transforms into The Hulk right then and there and goes on a rampage in search of his attempted assaulters. Obviously, people were pissed when this came out because the first time when we see ourselves clearly represented, we're depicted as rapists. The craziest part about this is Jim Shooter's response to the outrage where he said: "If I offended rapists, I'm glad. Incidentally, there are lots of perfectly upstanding, normal gay folks in the story, including several of the cops, storekeepers, and bystanders. What? You couldn't tell they were gay? There's a message there somewhere."

Somehow Jim Shooter didn't realize the only message he was sending was that it was ok to show LGBTQ+ individuals only if they were violent rapists and predators, just not ok if they were out-and-proud and, more importantly, one of the good guys. Hell, even if they were a supervillain, we'd be ok, but just not like a gay gym shower rapist.

To finish this article, please check out my blog *Queerview Mirror* at www.queerview-mirror.com.

What Keeps You Alive

A Movie Review by Mark Turnage

Suspension of disbelief is a narrative concept that hinges on an unspoken agreement between the film and its audience: even though we know we're watching something fictional, we subconsciously subscribe to the film's plot as a performative reality until its conclusion, or break it when characters or the plot behave in ways that no longer conform to the fiction we signed up for. One of the easiest ways to gauge suspension of disbelief is with horror movies, especially

if a main character does something foolish while trying to evade mortal peril. *What Keeps You Alive*, a Canadian thriller film written and directed by Colin Minihan, has several moments where the plot is strained a bit, but the compelling performances given by its two leads make its suspense entertaining.

To celebrate their first-year wedding anniversary, a lesbian couple, Jackie (Hannah Emily Anderson) and Jules (Brittany Allen) visit Jackie's family cabin in the remote Canadian wilderness. While there, an old childhood friend of Jackie's drops by unannounced and addresses her as "Megan." Suspicious and easily jealous, the couple's anniversary weekend is off to a cloudy start until Jackie explains to Jules a traumatic event from her childhood that caused her to leave her old life behind. The two reconcile, yet a shocking twist in the film's first twenty minutes turns everything we know about their relationship on its head. When the real victim of the story is revealed, it's a bloody struggle for survival between a methodical predator and prey that's wounded both physically and emotionally with nothing but her wits to survive.

The second narrative device this film uses is referred to as a "heel-turn," when a character suddenly shifts from good to evil (or vice-versa) in the form of a plot twist. A successful narrative heel-turn is won when we have enough knowledge about the character to inform our expectations about how they might react—then, when they do something that violently contradicts those expectations, it feels more like an earned surprise than contrived writing. The structure of *What Keeps You Alive* doesn't give the viewer enough background information about the character performing the heel-turn for there to be enough of a contrast between their "good" and evil self. The character's heel-turn is effective at how surprising it is, but it feels unearned considering how little we are given to go on so early in the film to establish expectations.

It's a paradoxical summary of *What Keeps You Alive* that the buy-in for the plot is quizzical, but the cat-and-mouse game between the protagonist and antagonist is incredibly thrilling, especially within the context of traps being sprung. The actresses at the center of this film are truly mesmerizing to watch and effectively capture the nuance of characters who have been in a long-term relationship. *What Keeps You Alive* is so close to being a darkly satirical take on LGBT relationships, but it doesn't quite have the courage to embrace that tone fully, preferring to stay firmly in survival horror territory for better and for worse. Scenes that sound cool on paper, like the barely alive "survivor" choosing to turn around mid-escape to pursue revenge instead of getting help, end up being perplexing in practice. Yet, perhaps most frustrating for an LGBT horror story is how it skirts unexplored narrative opportunities like relationship red flags and dating violence. One wonders how smart this film could have been if it had explored these avenues.

What Keeps You Alive is entertaining suspense, but only if you can stretch your suspension of disbelief. See it if you need a tense LGBTQ thriller but don't want to think too hard.



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First Friday
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Two Books That Couldn't Be More Different

by Steve Person



"Never copy, only create." That encapsulates everything that the Cartier brand stood for. In her gem of a book (pun intended), *The Cartiers*, Francesca Cartier Brickell, chronicled the fascinating history of four generations of jewelers who stamped their name on the concept of quality in the art of creating spectacular pieces dripping with precious stones and also making inroads into perfecting timepieces and other items of personal wear. Her grandfather, Jean Jacques Cartier, the last of the Cartiers to own the jewelry empire, provided Brickell with insights into the story of the founding of the company by Louis-Francois Cartier in 1847 in Paris. Brickell accidentally discovered a treasure chest of a trunk in her grandfather's rambling country house cellar while actually in search of a rare bottle of champagne. In the trunk were letters and memorabilia of the Cartier family's history.

Through meticulous sifting of the trunk's contents and in recorded conversations with her grandfather, Brickell skillfully recreated the family's business empire and also gave extensive insights into the personalities of the second and third generations of Cartier brothers who came after Louis-François. One of the highlights of the book is when Brickell quotes her grandfather (last of the third generation of Cartiers) through the use of text boxes within each chapter.

Of the many fascinating stories in the book, I think the most captivating is how the Cartiers came to own the Fifth Avenue townhouse of financier Morton Plant that became their headquarters for the American side of the business. In 1916 and before, the most valuable items of jewelry were natural pearls. "In 1916, Pierre Cartier put what he believed to be the most expensive necklace in the world in his New York showroom. It was worth more than \$1,000,000 (\$24,000,000 today)." Pierre managed to trade Morton Plant's house for the string of pearls! In those days, natural pearls were rarer than and more expensive than diamonds. Eventually, the Cartiers made the better part of the deal because once cultured pearls became perfected, the value of the necklace in question plummeted and sold for just \$151,000 in 1957.

By the time the fourth generation of the Cartiers came to inherit, there was little interest in continuing with the legacy their forebears worked so hard to instill, and they became more interested in living the lives of international jet setters. Although the name remains, Cartier was sold to investors in 1974. Jean Jacques passed away in 2010. His granddaughter spent nine years writing this marvelous book.

Conversely, Dylan Howard's slipshod book, *Royals at War*, purports to tell, "The untold story of Harry and Meghan's shocking split with the House of Windsor." As a reader, I came to the realization that this book got pushed out so quickly that whoever edited it was either uneducated with the Royal Family or just didn't care about details. For example, The Author's Note at the beginning asserts, "Not since the abdication crisis of 1936, when Edward VII renounced the throne to marry the American divorcee Wallis Simpson, had the monarchy faced a situation of such gravity." Duh. It was Edward VIII who abdicated. The author set out to smear Meghan Markle as much as possible, but even in this attempt he displays his ignorance (or lack of editing) by referring to Harry and Meghan as the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge after their 2018 wedding. The Queen made them the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. Cambridge is the name given to Harry's older brother William after his wedding to Catherine. The book is a prime example of cheap shots to make a profit. Enough said. Read the former, not the latter.