

First Friday News & Views

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



December 2021

Volume 26

Issue 12

Next Meeting

December 3

7:00 a.m.



Meeting Location

**Hoyt Sherman Place
15th & Woodland
Des Moines**



December Speaker

**Bishop
William
Joensen**



FFBC Website

ffbc Iowa.org



Showing Your Support May Save Lives

by Byron Huff, Board President

I wanted to follow up on my article from last month. The struggle I had in my youth, which included physical and mental bullying in high school, could have been prevented had there been resources and support from teachers, the school, and/or outside organizations. A recent study found 42% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. Was that statistic higher in past years? The answer is likely yes because we now have many organizations that support LGBTQ+ individuals and many schools now have [GSAs](#) (Gay Straight Alliances).

Every year I am amazed to tears what our scholarship recipients have done in their schools and communities to educate and support the LGBTQ+ community. What if the First Friday Breakfast Club scholarship program had been available to me back in the 70s? Would I have come out earlier or perhaps understood how fluid sexuality can be? Perhaps I would have stood up and advocated for LGBTQ+ students. To my knowledge, there were no LGBTQ+ students (which we all know, statistically, there were).

I can only hope that someday it is no longer necessary to “come out” because making a choice about your sexuality will be considered normal. Until then we need organizations like First Friday Breakfast Club to provide support for LGBTQ+ leaders who will go on to make a difference.

Your First Friday Breakfast Club dues only support our monthly in-person educational meetings. One hundred percent of your tax deductible donations go directly to our scholarship program; very few nonprofits can make that statement. If you able, please [donate](#) to the scholarship program to support our LGBTQ+ youth. **Thank you!**



The Reason for The Season: An Update of 2021?

by Ryan Crane, FFBC Vice President

As a nonreligious person, I have always wrestled with what Christmas (and the less charged but equally conflicted "holiday season") really means to me. Or even what it *should* mean to me.

Instead of focusing on the Baby Jesus and the Three Wise Men, I personally will seek to be more patient and empathic. Too many have experienced too much trauma and confusion and heartache in the last 20 months, so I will do less nitpicking and try to extend some grace to everyone I interact with. I still have a lot of room for improvement, but one small example is allowing myself to smile and be glad for people who started decorating for the holiday the day after Halloween. Hey, if someone is *that* excited for Christmas, let them have fun. Most of us skipped celebrating much last year, so perhaps there is room to make up for a lost season.

I will also focus on time to reconnect with family. "Family" is subjective and defined by each person, by the way. Life is too short to stay disconnected.

A short reflection this month.... Hope you'll join me in being a little more open-minded and cheerful in December!



Thanks to **Byron Huff** for introducing **Steve Karlin**, our November speaker. Thanks to **David Cotton** for managing our website and to **Nicholas Williams** for managing all of our Microsoft IT infrastructure. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter editor. *Thank you to all our contributors to the newsletter!*

The **deadline** for the **January newsletter** will be **December 27**. If you have something on your mind to share, type it up and email it to Wade (wadecpetersen@gmail.com) by the copy deadline.

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**. Your shopping with

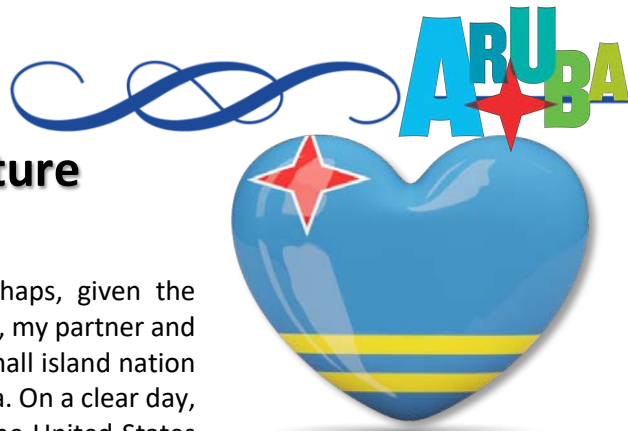


smile.amazon.com means that a small contribution to FFBC will be made with every purchase. Proverbial, found money.

Our fundraising efforts are ongoing to fund our scholarship program. To date we have raised over **\$450,000** 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 tax-deductible **contribution online** or by sending a check.

Please consider a **tax-exempt testamentary gift**. Our first legacy gift to the FFBC scholarship program came from **Cliff Paulsen** to the tune of over **\$67,000!** Contact **Byron Huff** for details or with questions.





Aruba: A Travel Adventure

by Jonathan Wilson

Against my better judgment perhaps, given the continued, worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, my partner and I decided to take a vacation to Aruba, a small island nation in the Caribbean off the coast of Venezuela. On a clear day, you can see Venezuela from the island. The United States government had identified Aruba as a high-risk destination because of the pandemic, which contributed to my level of angst about the trip. However, we were both fully vaccinated, and I had also had the booster. We love travel and really hadn't been able to do that in the earlier stages of the pandemic. We researched a bit about Aruba and the requirements for entry, and we were favorably impressed. In addition to requiring vaccinations, Aruba pandemic protocols required all incoming travelers to provide a negative COVID-19 test result within 72 hours prior to travel. Of the two available tests, Aruba required the more reliable, and more expensive test. We knew, of course, that all airlines were requiring passengers to wear a mask to cover mouths and noses. We'd flown domestically and observed approvingly how rigidly and insistently the airlines were enforcing that requirement. With those things in place, the risk seemed low enough for our mutual comfort. So, we booked our trip through Costco Travel, a service we'd never before used, and made an appointment for the necessary COVID-19 test, timed to get results before our departure.

As the day for the test approached, tension mounted to be careful so that we could minimize the chance of a positive test just before our scheduled departure, which would have been a huge complication. We even talked about what we'd do if one of us tested negative and the other tested positive. Remaining in the hypothetical category, I don't recall that we came to a firm decision about what we'd do if we got a "split decision."

Our test appointments were scheduled for a Tuesday prior to our departure on Thursday, with results promised on Wednesday and, therefore, within the 72-hour threshold. But get this, on the Monday before our scheduled tests, we received a notice from Costco Travel that our return flight on American Airlines had been canceled with no explanation from American Airlines, and no offer of help in finding another flight. We faced the prospect of getting to Aruba and being unable to get back home or, at least, back home around the time we had planned.

Originally, we were booked on one-stop flights going and coming through Charlotte, North Carolina. All connections had been at reasonable times, both coming and going. After being told that Costco Travel could not explore

other available airlines, we were stuck with three options: cancel our trip and get a refund of our air travel only, but still being obligated for our lodging reservation to the tune of \$800; stay an additional day at an additional cost of \$800 for another night at the hotel; or take a different American Airlines flight on the same day as our original departure back to the U.S. That different flight would go first to Miami where there'd be a 12-hour layover before a 6:00 a.m. flight on to Charlotte the next day before a last leg to Des Moines, arriving a day later than originally planned. That was the least expensive option and would require us to make hotel arrangements so we could get some sleep before getting up at 3:30 a.m. in order to get to the airport in time for a 6:00 a.m. departure. All this was BEFORE we had taken the COVID-19 tests. The trip was not getting off to a great start. We decided that our only realistic option was to accept the layover in Miami and the need to get back to the airport by 4:00 a.m. That option, apart from the obvious inconvenience of the early flight on to Charlotte, involved a hotel and travel from and to the Miami airport.

We went ahead with the tests on Tuesday and had our negative test results back that same day. We provided those results to Aruba authorities online and were set for departure.

Our flight from Des Moines, through Charlotte, was uneventful (as every flight should be), and we arrived timely in Aruba and cleared customs in minutes. The hotel was a beautiful property sitting by beautiful beaches on the northwest coast of a beautiful island. All good. Our trip package included breakfasts every day and unlimited mimosas. All good, especially the unlimited mimosas. The island provided great temperatures, lots of sunshine, and an almost constant, strong Caribbean breeze out of the northwest – so much so that trees and other vegetation grow at a slant leaning toward the southwest. In Aruba, no one needs a compass, and the beaches are remarkable. They are ground up coral, and, as a result, the beaches don't become hot in the open sun as they do on most beaches I've visited. The only negative was the cost of alcohol; a bottle of vodka that we'd pay \$18 for in the U.S. cost us \$80! If we return, we'll check a bag filled with alcohol. If we



December Speaker

Bishop William Joensen



The Most Rev. William M. Joensen, Ph.D. was ordained and installed as the 10th bishop of the Diocese of Des Moines on Sept. 27, 2019. Born in 1960, Bishop Joensen completed studies at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Ohio in 1989 and earned a doctorate in philosophy at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., in 2001. He was a member of the philosophy faculty at Loras College, where he served in a variety of roles, including dean of campus spiritual life. In addition to assisting with various regional health care-related ethics committees, then-Father Joensen participated for 12 summers as a faculty member for the Tertio Millennio Seminar in Krakow, Poland, which draws young adults from the United States, Poland, and eastern and central Europe, exploring Catholic social teaching in the spirit of St. John Paul II.



December In-Person Meeting Guidelines



We strongly recommend that members or guests who attend in person should be vaccinated for the safety of all. Board member Gary Moore stated it best, "Individual choices have community consequences. In regard to our community, state, and country's Delta variant pandemic spread, we encourage all who attend to have had their Covid vaccinations and wear their masks as appropriate during our meetings."

We also will require that all participants wear a mask when not eating. We will reduce the number of chairs at various tables to provide for some social distancing. Wearing a mask will also be required as you move through the food line (we will work to distance members while in line). If any member goes through the food line a second time, we ask that a clean plate is used.

This procedure is not just for the safety of our members, but out of respect for the safety of our speaker and food providers.

**LOVE
JOY
&
PEACE**

MOVING FORWARD IN SONG

DES MOINES GAY MEN'S CHORUS
FRIDAY & SATURDAY
DECEMBER 17 & 18 | 7:30 PM
PLYMOUTH CHURCH
4126 INGERSOLL AVENUE | DES MOINES
VISIT DMGMC.ORG FOR TICKETS



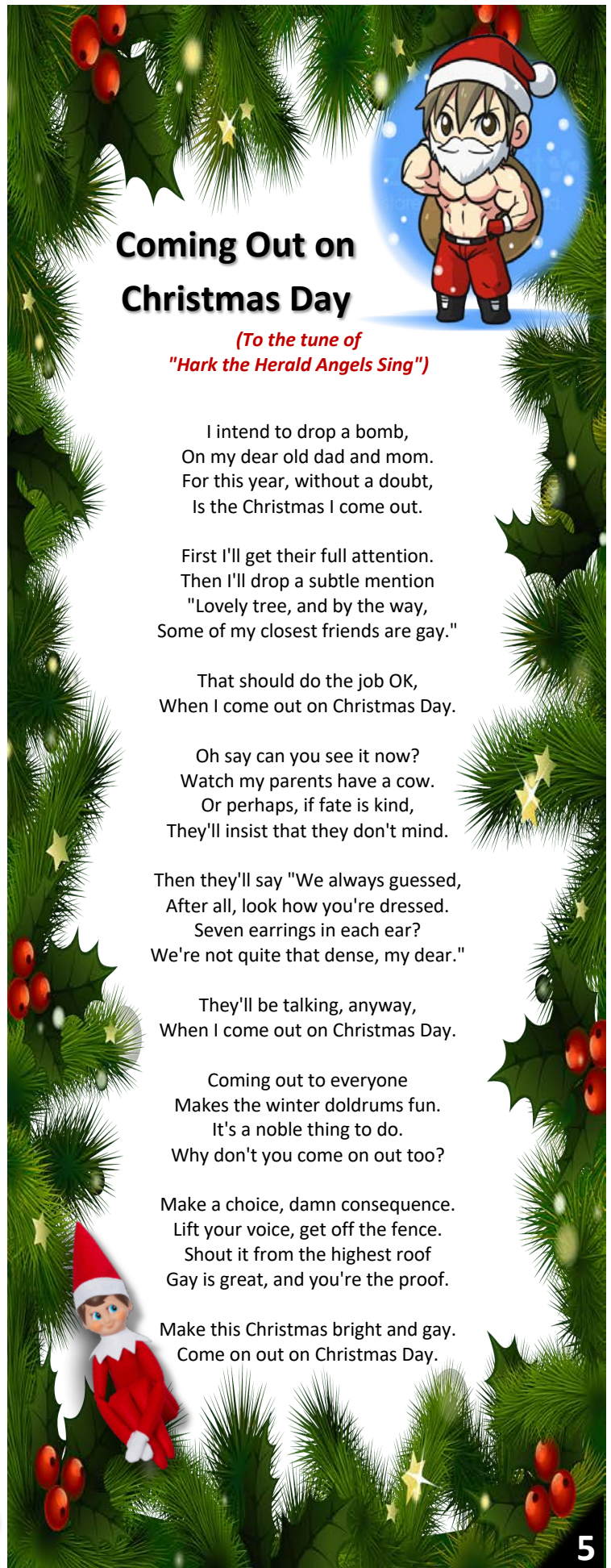
don't consume it, there'll be a profitable market for it.

The day came, too soon, for our return trip to the U.S. That also required negative COVID-19 test results within the 72-hour time frame; we tested on a Sunday morning with negative results back the same day. Our flight was the Tuesday following, and we made our way to the airport and through security. Waiting for our flight, there was a loudspeaker announcement that our flight would be delayed. No explanation. It was then announced that the flight would be further delayed; again, no explanation. And then it was announced that the flight would be further delayed, potentially until the next morning (which would require finding an overnight hotel somewhere or sleeping at the airport, and possibly compromising the timeliness of our negative test results). Ultimately, our flight did depart late that evening, arriving in Miami for our layover there around 10:30 p.m., at the hotel around 11:00 p.m., and up again at 3:30 a.m. for our connecting flight.

Back home, only one day late, we reflected upon our trip. Travel, particularly international travel, is always a bit of an adventure – part of the attraction. We concluded that, in Aruba, we had actually felt safer than at any time since the pandemic began. Everyone entering was vaccinated and had VERY recently tested negative. Tourists and locals were religious about wearing masks, unlike most places in the U.S. where vaccinations and masks are not required. It was a great trip; bookended by challenges getting there and back. Those elements of the trip were unpleasant and required more than usual flexibility.

To the credit of American Airlines, I wrote to them about our experience, and we have already heard back awarding us a \$400 credit for future travel. That covers our expense for the Miami layover. Frankly, I expected nothing, given the many recent flight cancellations by American Airlines and other airlines, so the \$400 credit was like found money and much appreciated.

Aruba is a go-to destination, even during the pandemic, and worth the adventure of getting there and back.



Coming Out on Christmas Day

*(To the tune of
"Hark the Herald Angels Sing")*

I intend to drop a bomb,
On my dear old dad and mom.
For this year, without a doubt,
Is the Christmas I come out.

First I'll get their full attention.
Then I'll drop a subtle mention
"Lovely tree, and by the way,
Some of my closest friends are gay."

That should do the job OK,
When I come out on Christmas Day.

Oh say can you see it now?
Watch my parents have a cow.
Or perhaps, if fate is kind,
They'll insist that they don't mind.

Then they'll say "We always guessed,
After all, look how you're dressed.
Seven earrings in each ear?
We're not quite that dense, my dear."

They'll be talking, anyway,
When I come out on Christmas Day.

Coming out to everyone
Makes the winter doldrums fun.
It's a noble thing to do.
Why don't you come on out too?

Make a choice, damn consequence.
Lift your voice, get off the fence.
Shout it from the highest roof
Gay is great, and you're the proof.

Make this Christmas bright and gay.
Come on out on Christmas Day.

FFBC: Honoring Its Own & Steve Karlin's Hope for the Future

by Gary Moore

Here it is already November of 2021 and First Friday Breakfast Club (FFBC) again gathered in person at the beautiful Hoyt Sherman Place to enjoy a breakfast with great companions and to hear a wonderful speaker tell his story so all can expand their horizons. President Byron Huff opened with his remarks of upcoming events and introduced Jim Sterba, President of Prime Timers of Central Iowa, to announce its upcoming monthly activities.

Byron then proudly introduced FFBC's own John Schmacker, one of this year's Legacy Leader Award winners to say a few words. I must digress and add my personal note: Since arriving in Des Moines in 1968 shortly after my father's promotion, whenever I would see a letter to the editor or a quotation in the news from a gay community representative that reflected a thoughtful and learned response, by and large, it was from this guy named John Schmacker. As the years went by and I got to know John, it always made me proud that this man often was the face of the gay community, especially during those times when it was difficult and brave to do so. Back to the task at hand.

Our speaker for November was a name and face familiar to most who live in central Iowa: co-host of the evening news on KCCI-TV, Steve Karlin. Although many know Steve from his nightly reporting, those attending this gathering of FFBC got to know Steve much more personally as he shared his story of fighting depression and anxiety for most of his adult life. Steve would share his life story and how, with the love and support of his wife of 32 years and his two daughters, he came to seek help.

As a young man, Steve was always driven but struggled with deep depression and suicidal thoughts. The first big bout of deep depression occurred when he quit college. His coping method was to run, literally run and run. Although physical activity is always good for mental health, it is not the cure-all if not combined with addressing the underlying issues. Steve said that too often his depression was handled by lashing out and blaming others or circumstances for his unhappiness. His depression was often also reflected by his inability to sleep and be well-rested, compounding his anxiety and depression.

Steve did return to college and afterward, began his career path with broadcasting at KCCI. Life became seriously more difficult for him when he had to anchor the morning news for KCCI. It meant getting up at 2:30 in the morning and putting on a happy face for the morning newscast. Once that was over, with the lack of sleep compounding issues, Steve talked of becoming more seriously suicidal. He noted his unhappiness led him to be more mentally abusive and noted he "could suck the air out of the room" when he entered.

Steve explained how his wife had encouraged him for years to seek help with his depression, but it was his daughter who finally convinced him to seek help. She had been diagnosed with ADD and Adderall was found to be very helpful for her. This started Steve on his road to help with mental illness. He sought help and was diagnosed with ADD and depression, but "being stubborn," he did not seek talk therapy until he and his wife were sorting through 24 years of pictures of their life together. There were pictures of 24 years reflecting a smiling and happy family. He started sobbing uncontrollably. It was time to talk, and he sought a therapist.



With the help of a talk therapist, Steve finally received the help he needed to understand how he contributed to situations aggravating his depression and understanding the difference between when his actions contributed and when circumstances were beyond his control. He gained insight into how his family dynamics gave him patterns of behavior that were helpful and others that were not. Through talk therapy, he found the difference between seeking happiness and enjoying contentment with who you are. Steve, as he approaches retirement age, is finally able to look back and appreciate how to be content, happy with a life that is filled with the love of his wife and remarkable daughters, a successful career, and great friends and co-workers. He tells his story in the hope that many others suffering from mental health problems will seek the help that will help them as he has been helped.



John Schmacker and Steve Karlin

Aging with Pride: IDEA

Innovations in Dementia Empowerment and Action
The Goldsen Institute - University of Washington

Part of the LGBTQ Community? LGBTQ & Memory Problems Research Study

A virtual study that may help those who have
Alzheimer's, dementia or memory problems.



Why should you participate?

- It's **TOTALLY FREE!**
- Advance health opportunities for people in the LGBTQ community who have Alzheimer's, dementia or memory problems in the comfort of your own home.
- Get coaching from trained coaches in problem-solving, improving communication, and a gentle exercise program designed to improve physical functioning.
- Get up to \$125 for completing telephone assessments.

Who can participate?

- Pairs participate in this study. One of the pair has Alzheimer's, dementia, or memory problems and is 50 years old or older. The other is their care partner.
- At least 1 person of the pair must be LGBTQ.
- Neither is currently living in a long-term residential care setting (i.e., nursing home).
- Pairs participate in virtual coaching sessions for 6 weeks.

About the research center:

The Goldsen Institute at the University of Washington is an innovation hub that researches vulnerable populations and creates interventions to improve their health, wellness, and longevity. The Goldsen Institute is dedicated to building a world where all ages thrive throughout their lives.



Take the first step
Scan the QR Code to Learn More

Connect with the research team at ageidea@uw.edu
Questions? Give us a call! 1-888-655-6646



**Mark
Your
Calendar!**



Future Speakers

January 7

Loren Olsen

FFBC member;
award-winning author

February 4

Edward Kelly

From Anti-gay Activist
to LGBTQ+ Ally

March 4

Mark Babcock

Carillon Player at St. Paul's
Episcopal Church DSM

April 1

David Miglin

Broadlawns Board Member
Visited Every Town in Iowa

May 6

Eric Shepard

Artistic Director & Conductor
Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus

June 3

Becky Smith

Executive Director
Iowa Safe Schools

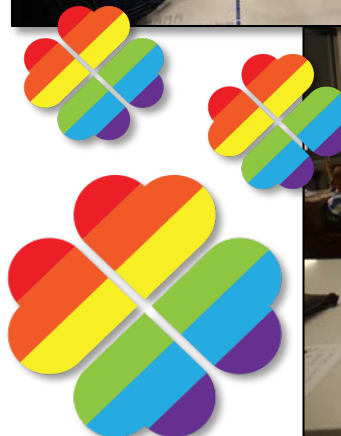


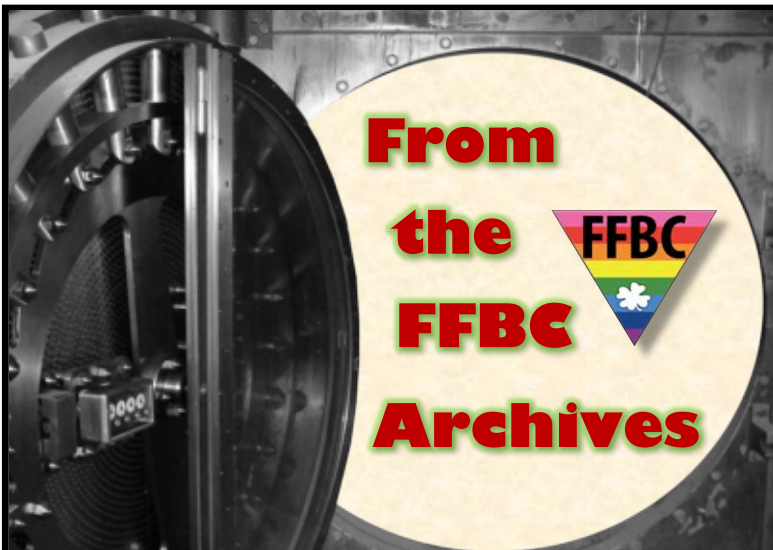
Photo Gallery

November Board Meeting & Letter Campaign Preparations



Photos by Gary Moore





5 Years Ago: December 2016

* In his article "WTF: In Search of Silver Linings," Jonathan expresses thoughts on the results of the 2016 elections. Since Republicans now control both houses of the legislature and the governor's office, they won't have divided government to blame when their policies fail to deliver on promised results. Jonathan then discusses how the White House now has a clueless apprentice in Donald Trump.

* Jordan Duesenberg gives us his notes on being an entitled gay millennial.

* Bruce Carr sums up the November speaker, Dr. Maria Filippone, who presented sobering facts and perceptions about the devastation that is the Palestinian territory of Gaza.

* Friedhelm Brinkhaus writes of his coming-out journey.

10 Years Ago: December 2011

* "Paying it Back By Paying it Forward" has Jonathan discussing how every person who is "out" has benefitted directly or indirectly from those who have gone before.

* Gary Kaufman reviews the movie *The Thing*.

* Michael Thompson, in his article "Being an Out Gay Man in Steve King Country," talks about apprehensively returning to Clarinda as a guest speaker after he had been "out" and married to Allen. The majority of those who welcomed them perhaps took away a new understanding of what a gay man and his same sex spouse are like—much like they are, only gay.

* Steve Person reviews *Cleopatra: A Life* as a fantastic book that he found at the Planned Parenthood book sale at the state fairgrounds.

15 Years Ago: December 2006

* "Haggard Haggard" by Jonathan Wilson discusses the Reverend Ted Haggard, the gay-bashing head of the National Association of Evangelicals, who admitted to using his parishioners' money to buy meth and a massage from a male prostitute. Haggard may be able to do something about his hankering for meth, but no amount of prayer or personal counseling is going to make him straight.

* Gary Kaufman reviews *Babel*, a film that explores differences and the difficulties that arise because of the existence of language barriers, customs, immigration policies, governments, and countries.

* Bruce Carr writes of November speaker, Althea Holcomb, CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Iowa. Holcomb's presentation was concise but passionate. In response to questions, she assured our group that BBBS is completely neutral about sexual orientation.



LGBTQ Workplace Culture Summit Continues

by Maddie Rocha Smith

We are excited to host the 5th Annual LGBTQ Workplace Culture Summit this year! The virtual format of this annual event consists of four incredible sessions. Experts will join us to provide insight and resources for employers looking to cultivate safe and inclusive workplaces. In each session, you'll learn more about the LGBTQ community, how to make more inclusive policies, attract and retain LGBTQ talent, and going beyond the pride flag to create meaningful change at your workplace.

The Summit continues December 1 at 2:00 p.m. You can register for the conference with a total of four sessions on One Iowa's website at oneiowa.org/wpcs2021.

**Session 3 – Beyond the Pride Flag:
Allyship in the Workplace**
Wednesday, December 1st, 2-4 p.m.

**Session 4 – Pride in the Community:
Allyship Outside the Workplace**
Wednesday, December 8th, 2-4 p.m.



Biden Got it Done

by Supervisor Matt McCoy
Polk County, 5th District



The allusive infrastructure bill that has plagued the past two presidents was passed as part of President Biden's **Build Back Better** Agenda. This bipartisan bill made historic investments in hard and soft infrastructure, which has massive amounts of new dollars targeted for Iowa. According to analysis from Representative Cindy Axne's office, Iowa is set to receive over \$5 billion from the passage of this \$1 trillion package. To provide some context, the state's annual budget is roughly \$7 billion. This is the single largest infrastructure investment since President Dwight D. Eisenhower created the federal highway system. Rep. Axne's office provided the breakdown below in a recent press release.

- \$3.4 billion for highway repairs
- \$638 million for water infrastructure
- \$432 million for replace and repair bridges
- \$305 million for public transportation
- \$120 million for airport infrastructure
- \$100 million for broadband internet



Most notably, most of the water infrastructure dollars will go towards replacing lead pipes and helping water plants with needed capacity and expansion. In addition, Iowa has led the nation in worst bridge conditions in the country. Per capita, we're near the top four states that have bad bridges, and this is a result of many of our farm-to-market needs, which require many bridges over rural creeks and streams. Additionally, the Des Moines International Airport was constructed in the 1950s and has reached its lifespan capacity to service flights from all over the nation, including new entrances into the Des Moines market like Allegiant, Southwest, and other budget airlines. A new \$450 million terminal is planned which will involve investment by the city, county, state, and this federal appropriation. In regard to public transportation investments, the current DART garage is located in the Gray's Landing area of downtown Des Moines. It is very outdated and slated to be replaced with a \$50 million garage, which will service electric busses as our fleet is expected to convert to all electric by 2030. This garage will provide much needed service areas for the maintenance and management of our aging fleet.

A recent study conducted by Polk County and other entities found that the digital divide in Iowa is real. More than 40% of homes reported speeds of less than 25 mpbs which is not only insufficient for advanced communication uses, but do not even meet FCC definition of high speed broadband. You could compare it to a bump up from dialup. Among rural speeds, 64% were lower than 25 mbps. The funding from the federal government will provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve broadband technology across the state of Iowa, helping underserved rural areas and improving our communication system to better serve our sparsely populated state. The state of Iowa has made a commitment up to \$450 million in broadband between 2021 and 2024, with some of that actually being federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan passed by Congress and signed by President Biden last spring. This, along with the federal funding, should be a game changer for Iowa for generations to come. Every American will see and be impacted by these transformational infrastructure projects, and I'm truly proud of President Biden and Congress.

Merry
Christmas



First Friday Breakfast Club wishes
you peace, love, and joy during this
holiday season!



Midnight Mass

A Netflix Series Review by Mark Turnage

For more than a few queer people, it's difficult not to have an apprehensive reaction to subjects of religion, fictional or not. Although the prevalence and accessibility of open and affirming congregations have increased over the past few decades, religious trauma casts a significant shadow over past and present queer culture. While no LGBT characters populate Mike Flanagan's 7-episode Netflix series *Midnight Mass*, its themes of religious persecution, loss of faith, and toxic Christianity will strike familiar chords with those who count these among their own queer experience. As a blend of psychological and supernatural horror, *Midnight Mass* delivers—as a critique of religious trauma and cult-like zealotry; however, it's more preaching to the choir.

After being released from prison for a drunk driving accident that killed a teenager, Riley Flynn (Zach Gilford) returns to his dying New England hometown of Crockett Island, population 127, to rebuild his life at his family home. A sizable portion of the island's population are parishioners at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, including all of Flynn's family: stoic dad Ed (Henry Thomas), forgiving mom Annie (Kristin Lehman), and altar boy brother Warren (Igby Rigney). When charismatic new pastor Father Paul Hill (Hamish Linklater) arrives in town to cover for their missing Monsignor, the town is respectful, but skeptical—until seemingly divine miracles begin to happen in Father Hill's presence. As the new pastor's congregation grows with the zeal of holier-than-thou resident Bev Keane (Samantha Soyan), some residents become disaffected by the new pastor's fervor, and begin to suspect there may be something ominous behind both the miracles they're witnessing and Father Hill himself.

Those familiar with Flanagan's previous works (*The Haunting of Hill House*, *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, *Doctor Sleep*) will spot some recurring narrative devices: a viscerally scary, psychedelic ghost that's an embodiment of past guilt; a dysfunctional family tied together by grief; and a somewhat *Game of Thrones* mentality that no character is safe from a brutal end. It's a slow-burn story meant to unsettle more than shock, but perhaps could use a shade more excitement between those first few episodes' monologues to improve its pacing and engage more with the plot's central mystery. If you're already somewhat put off by the subject matter, it's going to be a few episodes before the sermons give way to narrative payoff. But I will say that when the church does cross over into cult territory, it unquestioningly transitions into a horror series, and does so unforgettably.

If horror is the genre that unmask myths about society, then the best horror confronts its audience—and while writing this review, I'm uncertain if *Midnight Mass* succeeds in the latter. It shows us how religious fanaticism can cannibalize communities, yet no one loses their overall convictions or *doubts*. Its conclusion presents guilt as a unifying factor and a more Old-Testament view of sin and sacrifice, and makes its saints as expendable as its sinners to set up one more Biblical parallel for its final frames.

Yet *Midnight Mass* is full of powerhouse performances, especially Linklater's Father Hill—a multilayered, complex character Flanagan expertly steers away from stereotype and whose crisis of faith allows worse forms of evil to gain power. Rahul Kohli's Sherriff Hassan, the only Muslim on the island, compellingly captures both a father trying to raise his son in his own faith traditions and a professional but world-weary outsider the townspeople disparagingly call "Sharif." And lastly, Soyan's Bev is superb as the implacable face of religious extremism.

If you want creepy Catholic psychological horror with big Stephen King vibes, check out *Midnight Mass* on Netflix, and don't say I didn't warn you about episode 6.



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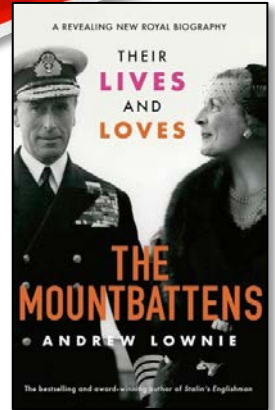
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First Friday Breakfast Club
P.O. Box 41611
Des Moines, IA 50311

The Mountbattens

by Andrew Lownie

A Book
Review by
Steve Person



“No biography has any value unless it is written with warts and all.” Lord Mountbatten

The irony of that statement by Lord Mountbatten is that he did everything in life to keep the “warts and all” away from the prying eyes of those who could or would do harm to his reputation. Lownie’s book answers many questions about Lord Louis and Lady Edwina Mountbatten that the two strove for decades to keep from being made public.

Lord Mountbatten—Dickie to those who knew him closely—was born in 1900, a great grandson of Queen Victoria. Edwina Ashley entered into the world in 1901. Both of them were driving forces of the twentieth century.

Dickie wasn’t even a Mountbatten when he was born. His father, Prince Louis of Battenberg, married a favorite granddaughter of Queen Victoria whose name was also Victoria. When World War I broke out in 1914, Prince Louis was the First Sea Lord of the British Navy. With his German ancestry and accent, he changed the family name of Battenberg to the more anglicized Mountbatten. Still, just being of German origin was enough to make him suspect, and he resigned his commission.

Edwina Ashley, a descendant of Pocahontas and Prime Minister Lord Palmerston, grew up in a wealthy family, one of the richest in Great Britain. When she and Dickie married in 1922, Mountbatten stood to live a life of great privilege. When Edwina’s father died in 1939, she inherited Broadlands in Hampshire and one of the great country houses of England by the River Test. The marriage originally turned out to be an albatross for Edwina since she had no compunction about taking on lovers. She carried on with various men until World War II broke out. With her country at war, her globetrotting came to an end, and she became a valued member of many organizations helping the poor and those who lost loved ones in the war.

Dickie became a naval officer, and his career goal was to get himself to the post of First Sea Lord in order to avenge the unfair ousting of his father in the First World War. As an officer, Dickie commanded many ships in the Royal Navy, and he was not averse to calling on his royal connections to get career goals he aspired to. He eventually became First Sea Lord. In 1947, Prime Minister Clement Attlee had King George VI make Dickie the last Viceroy of India with the instruction of making the switch from colony to country as smooth as possible. Circumstances made that transition far from amiable.

In 1979, Mountbatten was brutally murdered along with some family members when the IRA blew up his yacht just off the coast of Ireland. He had long been a target of the IRA, and he died instantly. Unfortunately for the IRA, which claimed responsibility shortly after the explosion, it lost much credibility since they also murdered a teenager aboard the boat and crippled others.

Perhaps the most engrossing part of the book is Chapter 28, “Rumours.” Dickie’s sexuality had always aroused curiosity, and Edwin’s many affairs—the most famous being her decades-long association with Jawaharlal Nehru—prompted the FBI to keep a file on them. Because of her affair with the African-American Paul Robeson and his penchant for young boys, Lownie concludes that both were bisexual in their activities, and he provides first-hand accounts that prove that to be so.

There are still many documents that are kept secret and that could possibly shed more light on these two fascinating individuals.