



First Friday News & Views

Monthly Newsletter of the First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.



March 2022

Volume 27

Issue 3

Next Meeting

March 4

7:00 a.m.



Meeting Location

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



March Speaker

**Mark
Babcock**



FFBC Website

ffbcia.org



Pet Friendly

by Byron Huff, Board President

Pets are an important part of many people's lives. While dogs dominate more homes with cats being a close second, many other domesticated pets create a bond with their family members. People often prefer dogs because they tend to provide more physical affection, while cats can be quite aloof. Of course, there are exceptions, but the stereotypes persist.

I grew up on a farm in rural Iowa where cats and dogs were not only family members, but important to a living, breathing, rural culture. Cats were important to keep rodents at bay, while dogs often assisted with herding cattle or guarding livestock.

I learned early on that I had a severe allergy to cats and birds, as well as most of the elements present on a farm, including dust, mold, ragweed, and more. My parents had a pet parakeet that they taught to say phrases like "Byron's a pretty boy"; once Whitely passed, there would be no replacement. Cats were kept outside because my throat would close up with indoor exposure to them.

My grandparents heard that chihuahuas could help children with allergies, so we adopted Meecha who was a short-haired Mexican chihuahua. My sister and I would tease Meecha to the point that she really didn't like us. She was a sweet dog, and we did bond with her as we got older; she lived over 14 years, passing away while I was in college.

We also had large outside dogs over the years, starting with a boxer mix named Princess. There are grainy pictures of her pulling a wagon with me. I remember her passing on a hot summer day that caused a goiter to swell in her neck, causing her to suffocate. Her death was very traumatic for me as I still recall begging my parents to help her.

One outdoor dog, Queeny, was a female German Shepherd that I raised to show in 4-H. I spent hours teaching her to sit, lie, stay (for extended periods unattended), and heel. When showtime came, she lost by one point to a poodle because Queeny moved a paw slightly when she was to remain in one place. I'm still bitter ;).

[continued on page 2]



**First Friday Breakfast Club will
meet IN PERSON and also be available via
Zoom for the March 4 meeting.**

After graduating college, I yearned for the companionship of a dog. I had moved to Cedar Falls/Waterloo for a new job in 1985, leaving my college friends back in Des Moines. I adopted an eight-week-old miniature schnauzer that I named Morgan. I used my experience training Queeny to teach her manners that would make her such a wonderful dog. A coworker with twin toddlers would dog-sit for me which made Morgan love children.

I moved to Cedar Rapids in 1990 then on to Des Moines in 1995 where Jim and I met at the Blazing Saddle. Morgan would have been about 10 years old by then, so Jim quickly became her second dad. Morgan moved with us to New Orleans in 1997 and onto Gurnee, a Chicago suburb, in 1998. The kids in our neighborhood would knock asking if Morgan could come out and play. Morgan had a scan that indicated she had a mass that was likely cancerous, and she was too old for surgery; we made the difficult decision to put her down. She now has a gravestone in the back yard of my parents' farmhouse.

Jim and I then adopted two Yorkies (Yorkshire terriers) we named Thelma and Louise; they quickly made friends with the neighborhood children. The girls moved with us back to Des Moines in 2003 as work took us full circle back home. Unfortunately, Louise had health issues which led us to make another painful decision to have her euthanized at only nine years old; she is buried near Morgan on my parents' farm. Thelma, the crazy one, lived another three years when a sudden health issue forced us to have her euthanized. We had her cremated with the plan to bury her next to Louise; her ashes were boxed up as we downsized and moved to downtown Des Moines so we have not taken them out to the farm as of this writing.

We took a dog hiatus of two years before my yearning for another dog brought us to adopt a 10-week-old Maltese/Yorkie mix we named Presha (Hindu name meaning loving and beloved). She has been such an amazing dog; it is hard to believe she will be seven years old on March 23. We all like to think we learn as we grow older; I feel we used our years of experience (and a little luck) to shape her into the most loving dog that doesn't know she is a dog. Follow her on FaceBook: Presha Anderson-Huff. I hope she outlives me because the pain of losing a beloved pet can be more traumatic than losing a family member.



Thanks to **Byron Huff** for introducing **Edward Kelly**, our February 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 **April newsletter** will be **March 21**. 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.



The Price of Underfunding Education

by Jonathan Wilson

It's been said that we don't know what we don't know. It's hard to argue with that. It's also said that what you don't know, you can't teach. Hard to argue with that too. And the combination of those two statements explains how a civilization devolves and, essentially, dumbs-down the citizenry. To whose advantage? The advantage of those who are, as a result, more easily able to manipulate the citizenry. And, on top of that, the victims of this dumbing-down aren't aware that they have been thusly victimized, which circles back to the axiom that you don't know what you don't know. Untaught history; untaught facts; untaught science: untaught critical thinking skills; untaught the RESPONSABILITY of citizenship in a democracy.

The very foundation of a surviving, functioning democratic form of self-governance relies upon avoiding that devolution. Quality, free, public education is key, and we in the United States haven't had either for decades. By underfunding public education, we impact both the quality part and the free part. I first ran for school board because of my perception then that public schools were underfunded; that was 1983! The funding of public education has not improved in now almost four decades since I had that sadly-accurate perception. Public education funding has even taken some significant hits thanks to the diversion of money to private schools – like subsidizing people who install private swimming pools because they don't want their kids swimming in a public pool, and then they don't care a whit about the quality of the public pools in their community.



Regarding the free part: free public education wasn't the fact in 1983, and isn't now. In 2022 – this year -- my children are paying boatloads of money for the educational opportunities available to my five grandchildren, for a charge. Those with more limited resources are denied those opportunities. My grandkids will be fine, but all of us pay a non-monetized price when we have to interact in our daily lives with unaware, dumbed-down people who have been denied what they don't know, but could have been taught.

School boards in this country are under assault as never before in recent memory by those who don't want uncomfortable history taught, uncomfortable books read, enhanced critical thinking skills taught, or basic civics instruction. By those who have been victimized by the dumbing-down devolution.

When next you have to interact with someone that you think is not hitting on all cylinders (so to speak), be sure to ask yourself, "How/what have I done at the ballot box or otherwise to support proper funding for free, quality public schools?" The less you've done in answer to that introspective question, the more you yourself are to blame for the unsatisfactory, frustrating interaction you've just experienced. Same goes for unsatisfactory, frustrating election outcomes.

The dead do have a pact with the living: teach what you have learned, learn from the mistakes of your predecessors, explore ways to address those mistakes to advance the common good, and teach those ways. You too will die, and you want to claim that pact with those who will live after you. And you want to claim a surviving, functioning democratic form of self-governance for the sake of your progeny.



**"I think that the longer I look good,
the better gay men feel."**

[Cher]



March Speaker

Mark Babcock



Mark A. Babcock is the Director of Choral Activities at Central College. He directs the select 60-voice A Cappella Choir, the select 24-voice Chamber Singers, and the large College Community Chorus which performs with the college orchestra. Professor Babcock is active in the church music and music education fields in addition to his work at Central College. He has been the Dean of the Central Iowa Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, and he is a leader in the Iowa Choral Director's Association: Repertoire and Resources Chair for Music and Worship (past), 2015 Summer Symposium Chair, and currently as Past President.

Babcock is also the Cathedral Organist/Choirmaster/Carillonneur at the historic Cathedral Church of St. Paul in downtown Des Moines. He learned to perform on the Cathedral's carillon during his Central College supported sabbatical in the spring of 2018. He provides choral and organ consultation, festival leadership, and music training in a variety of settings. As a recognized organ recitalist, he was honored by Iowa State University as the 2005 "Organist of Iowa." His organ performances demonstrate the versatility, virtuosity, and improvisation that draw audiences to the "King of Instruments."



LGBTQ Day on the Hill 2022

March 1 @ 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

***RALLY AT THE CAPITOL. TALK TO YOUR LEGISLATORS.
FIGHT FOR LGBTQ IOWANS.***

9 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.:

Registration and Material Pick-Up
(State Historical Building)

9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.:

"Talking to Your Legislator" Training

11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.:

Lunch

12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.:

Rally in the Capitol Rotunda

1:30 p.m. - 3 p.m.:

Meetings with Legislators



**one
iowa**



Future Speakers

April 1

David Miglin

Broadlawns Board Member Who
Visited Every Iowa Town

May 6

Eric Shepard

New Artistic Director & Conductor
Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus

June 3

Becky Smith

Executive Director
Iowa Safe Schools

July 16

FFBC PARTY

Home of FFBC Member,
John Schmacker

August 5

Jerry Hatfield

Climate Change

September 2

Cindy Axne

U.S. House Representative

October 7

Dana Cardin

Retired KCCI
Reporter and Asst. News Director

Eye-Popping Pedicure

by Jonathan Wilson



So, to indulge myself, I went for a pedicure two days before Christmas. I was not alone; the place was packed with others similarly indulging themselves. Seated immediately beside me was a woman who was talking on her cell phone incessantly. I'm confident that she talks less in February than in any other month. Talking a lot was not the issue; the issue was that she had her phone on speaker, so everyone within earshot could hear both sides of her two, successive phone calls that, together, consumed all of the time for her pedicure to be completed.

She was speaking in English, sort of. It was more like a dialect version of English, distinguished by a nearly complete disregard for grammar. It almost seemed intentional, as if she could turn it off if she chose to do so, which she didn't. I don't think she completed a single sentence without a grammatical error – often several of them. Intentional or not, the poor grammar wasn't the eye-popping feature of her phone conversations.

She may not have known proper grammar or parts of speech like verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, whatever, but she could turn some form of the word "fuck" into every part of speech there is. Virtually every sentence included at least one such usage – often multiple uses. Sometimes an adjective; sometimes a verb; sometimes a noun; and sometimes hyphenated with "mother." All being heard by everyone within earshot. And that wasn't the eye-popping feature.

In one of her two phone conversations the person she was talking to was complaining about being tired. The response came in her anti-grammar dialect, laced with one F bomb after another and, in substance, said, "You not f**king tired. You working at that f**king group home; when I worked at that f**king s**thole, I was lyin' down restin' most of the f**king time, so don't give me your 'I'm tired' crap."

And then to the eye-popping, second phone conversation. The person she was talking to suggested that the family not get together for Christmas until some day after Christmas Day. The response was brutal. My pedicure neighbor blurted out, "It's f**king Christmas, for God's sake. It comes on the same f**king day every f**king year. It's no f**king surprise to you."

And then the eye-pop came: "I know you just put your mamma in the f**king ground, but it's your turn to f**king host, damn it, and we're all going to f**king be there."

Imagine a Merry Christmas greeting after that!!

She talks less in February and, if you removed "fuck" in any form from her vocabulary, on any given day she'd have half as much to say. The sad part was that she had her pretty pre-teen daughter with her to get a manicure while mom was getting a pedicure. I fear that there's a cycle that is likely to be repeated.

And, it got me thinking about the politicization of school boards by those demanding deference to what parents want taught. My pedicure neighbor is a testament to the fact that blind deference to parental wishes is not the right balance.

In The Kitchen

with Brian Carlson



This Month's Recipe:

VEGETABLE SOBA NOODLE SOUP

Made from buckwheat instead of wheat, quick-cooking soba noodles are a healthy alternative to traditional pasta. This recipe is based with chicken broth, but vegetarians and vegans can easily substitute vegetable broth. For carnivores, feel free to add your favorite protein such as cubed firm tofu or sliced grilled chicken.

Ingredients:

- 8 cups low sodium chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons grapeseed or olive oil
- 1/2 medium red onion, finely chopped
- 4 cloves fresh garlic, minced
- 3 tablespoons ginger, minced
- 2 tablespoons seasoned rice wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon toasted sesame oil
- 3-4 dried hot chilies or a few dollops of sauce (Sriracha or chili paste)
- 10 ounces dry soba noodles
- 6 cups non-starchy mixed fresh vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, peppers, celery, baby corn, water chestnuts, bamboo shoots, bean sprouts, napa cabbage
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- Roughly chopped fresh herbs such as parsley, cilantro, chives, or Thai basil
- Toasted sesame seeds



Directions:

1. In 4-quart stockpot, add olive oil and heat to shimmering over medium-low heat. Add garlic, ginger, and onion and cook, stirring frequently, until aromatics are just translucent. Add chicken broth, vinegar, soy sauce, sesame oil, and chilies or hot sauce. Increase heat to high and bring to a boil.
2. Add vegetables and bring to just about boiling. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 20 minutes to meld the flavors. Add soba noodles and simmer for 6-7 minutes or until noodles are soft. Season soup with salt and pepper to taste. Ladle hot soup into large bowls, garnish with fresh herbs, and sprinkle with a few sesame seeds.

Serve with green salad and whole grain bread for dipping. I used whole wheat biscuits leftover from breakfast in the photo. (Serves 4-6 people)



From Bigot to LGBTQ+ Ally

by Gary Moore



With the outside temperature at zero degrees and due to the recent surge in cases of Covid, the First Friday Breakfasts Club returned to meeting via Zoom for February. Our guest speaker was Edward Kelly, Jr., who spoke about his journey from anti-gay Pentecostal fundamentalist activist to LGBTQ+ advocate. Edward Kelly, Jr., a former Vietnam veteran, served as a Pentecostal Evangelist in Iowa for 25 years and a pastor for six years. He is the author of *Journey into Love*, an account of his passage out of judgmental Fundamentalism. He has a B.A. in Business Management from Buena Vista University, a Master's in Theology from Franciscan University (Steubenville, Ohio), and an M.B.A. from Columbia Southern University. He lives in Red Oak, Iowa, with his wife, and he continues to write and speak for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. He is now a member of the Spiritual Naturalist Society and NAACP.



February Speaker

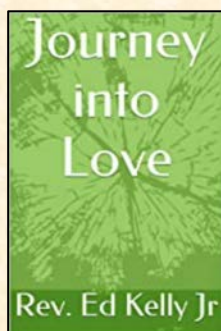
February Speaker **Edward Kelly**

Over thirty members and friends of FFBC enjoyed Mr. Kelly's presentation as the morning sun rose with its pink hues. Ed showed slides to describe how he was a carrier of the disease, biblical hate, where he turned the gospel love into a message of hate. Ed would review the most used Biblical passages that were turned into messages of condemnation and hate and how they were false once put under the scrutiny of cultural and historical perspectives.

He noted that it was a gradual process of learning that started during a personal dark time in 1996 when he started to match his thoughts to reality. Rather than an unquestioning adoption of black and white answers, he started to examine the Bible as any other document, taking into account the cultural, historical perspective, and language constraints of the times in which passages were written.

He talked about how during his 30 years of being a biblical bigot, he refused to even talk to anyone he thought might be homosexual. Beginning in 2010, Ed started talking to gay people and how that started to humanize the people he once condemned. He noted how a member of FFBC, John Chaplin, who had been a visiting pastor in a local Red Oak church, became a great influence in his transition from Biblical bigot to LGBTQ ally and activist.

When asked how one could help such a Christian Nationalist start to be less bigoted, Ed replied that it is a slow process. Non-judgmental feedback plants seeds to bring up later questions. One must first start to ask questions. He reported how a simple observation that another paster made that Ed saw the world in only black and white would later come back to haunt him. Often a simple non-judgmental observation would plant a seed of self-introspection further down the road. But you need to maintain a conversation, an interaction, in order to plant the seed(s) of change.



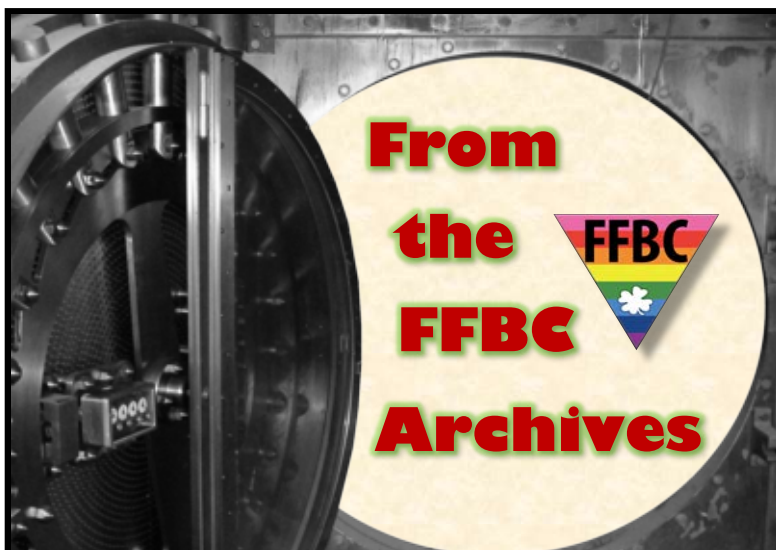
The cold February morning seemed warmed by the acceptance and sharing through the Zoom camera of this morning's speaker as well as the birthday wishes sent to our founder, board member, and President Emeritus, Jonathan Wilson.

"Hate is a contagion; it grows and spreads as a disease. No society is so healthy that it can automatically maintain its immunity."

-- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



February's Meeting via Zoom



5 Years Ago: March 2017

* In "The Truth About Job Creation," Jonathan Wilson discusses the trickle-down effect of tax breaks for the wealthy. "The fact is that we can give tax breaks to the rich until the cows come home and the only jobs created will be for their bankers, brokers, and financial advisors."

* Bruce Carr summarizes the February speaker, Dennis Goldford, known to many as the political commentator on KCCI TV. Goldford accused Democrats and Hillary Clinton of running a highly ineffective presidential campaign. The most reliable voter turned out to be the voter who felt robbed of his job and country.

* Steve Person reviewed the book *John Adams* by David McCullough. Person describes the author, "His ability to relate the lives of historical figures in clear and riveting language is testament to his skill as a writer."

10 Years Ago: March 2012

* Mike Smith reports that the annual Red Party scholarship fundraiser sponsored by FFBC raised a record \$30,000 for Iowa students.

* Senator Matt McCoy, in his article "Ensuring All Iowans Get the Coverage They Deserve," reports that hundreds of high-risk Iowans have been denied insurance coverage for their medical needs because of the failure of a high-risk insurance pool program. The program failed to register hundreds of HIV-positive residents of Iowa. He has begun work in the Senate to address the issue.

* Bruce Carr writes about the February speaker, John Berry. Berry, the Director of the White House Office of Personnel Management, is the highest ranking openly gay official in the Obama administration.

15 Years Ago: March 2007

* In "A Haggard Miracle," Jonathan Wilson describes the not-so-reverend Ted Haggard who underwent three weeks of intense counseling to have folks believe he is 100% heterosexual. For Haggard's gullible followers, his conversion from gay to straight in record time is probably a miracle.


* Gary Kaufman reviewed the movie *Dreamgirls*. The film (and play) are loosely based on the career of the Supremes. Many sad and joyous events are shared. Even with a great performance by Eddie Murphy, the real star of the show is Jennifer Hudson who plays Effie. Hudson would go on to win many awards for her role.


* Craig Smith, the Aviation Director of the Des Moines International Airport, was the February speaker, and Bruce Carr summarizes his talk about the several improvements made to the airport. Smith hopes that lower fares and a wider range of non-stop flights will convince more people to avoid driving to Omaha or Kansas City for service.

DES MOINES GAY MEN'S CHORUS
2021/2022 CONCERT SEASON

YOU ARE ENOUGH


FEATURING 'YOU ARE ENOUGH: A MENTAL HEALTH SUITE' & PREMIERING 'SANCTUARY' BY BEN WEXLER

 **FRIDAY, MARCH 25 • 7:30 PM**
SHESLOW AUDITORIUM AT DRAKE UNIVERSITY
2507 UNIVERSITY AVE • DES MOINES

 SCAN OR VISIT [DMGMC.ORG](https://dmgmc.org) FOR TICKETS

MARCH

**What
butter and
whiskey
will not
cure,
there's
no cure
for.
Irish
Proverb**



8

Cost of Clean Water

by Supervisor Matt McCoy
Polk County, 5th District



If you're one of the 600,000 central Iowans who rely on Des Moines Water Works for safe, clean, and quality water, you have probably noticed that your water bill has increased by 15% over the last six months. This is a result of needing to invest in the largest nitrate removal system in the world. The Raccoon River Watershed supplies the vast amount of water that residents of the golden circle rely on. The Des Moines River is a secondary water source, and both of those rivers are what we consider surface water. Currently, Des Moines Water Works does not draw from any aquifers to provide services to its customers. It is estimated that the new nitrate removal system will cost well over \$100 million, and ratepayers will pay for this system under the new regional cooperative agreement proceeding with the suburbs and the city of Des Moines. With more than 600,000 customers, it is probably high time that those customers start demanding more out of their legislature in terms of regulatory actions which not only would measure the nitrates entering into the Raccoon River Watershed, but also creating a system which requires reduction in nitrates that pass through the thousands of tiles that lead into the Raccoon River.

This past year, Polk County completed 51 tile projects which created a saturated buffer system at the edge of the tiles which separate the nitrates from water through a natural process. This is a filtration system primarily established as a method of controlling fertilizer runoff, which occurs naturally through weather events. This coming year, Polk County will be working with Story County and expanding into Dallas and Boone Counties to complete another 85 saturated buffer projects. In addition, Polk County, with one-time American Rescue Plan Act money, will plant cover crops at the edge of all fields which border creeks, rivers, and streams in Polk County. The county purchased a specialized piece of equipment that has long arms, which reach down into an uneven creek area and rake-seed into the soil where the cover crops are established. This specialized equipment ensures that the seeds planted do not runoff into the water source.



In addition, the final area that Polk County is focused on is creating two large wetlands upstream in cooperation with Heartland Coop of up to 5,000 acres each. This will capture and treat rainwater and eventually drain it into our water drinking sources, which have already been filtered through this process. Currently, Iowa is a recipient of more than \$25 million worth of federal money to build upstream resiliency in these wetlands and are working cooperatively with Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever in the Raccoon River Watershed. Ultimately, rural and urban Iowans must build trusting relationships to accomplish nitrate reduction, which involves a series of completions of small but strategic projects like saturated buffers, expanding resiliency upstream, investment in soil preservations, and health through cover crops. We all depend upon these relationships to accomplish the objectives of reducing nitrates in our drinking water. While the legislature and the governor are unwilling to tackle these complex issues, you should be rest assured that Polk County is doing all it can at completing and building healthy urban-rural relationships that foster cooperation and action within central Iowa.



**Why should you never iron
a four-leaf clover?**

(You don't want to press your luck!)



Spencer

A Movie Review by Mark Turnage

Where do you escape to when “tradition” becomes a prison corrosive to your mental health? Pablo Larrain’s Princess Diana biopic, described in its epigraph as “a fable of a true tragedy,” would be stronger if its metaphors were less heavy-handed, but the mania Kristen Stewart’s Diana carries into each confrontation with a stoic and indifferent Royal Family makes for captivating suspense, as well as the narrative’s smart correlation to modern cultural anxieties.

We open with Diana, Princess of Wales (Kristen Stewart) driving through the English countryside alone in her Porsche. It’s Christmas weekend, and Diana is distracted, tense, and impulsive. She’s also falling apart; her husband Prince Charles’ (Jack Farthing) affair with Camilla Parker-Bowles has become public. Despite telling the royal chef (Sean Harris) she encounters that she’s lost, her boarded-up country home is the property next to Sandringham House, where the Royal Family is gathering for the holidays. It’s an obligation Diana wants nothing more than to be done with, but she plays along, feeling like she has no choice in the matter. Upon entering Sandringham House, the extent to which her life has been regimented becomes apparent, as well as her own resistance to rigid royal formality. Much to her own displeasure, Major Gregory (Timothy Spall), the Queen’s Equerry, weighs her when she arrives, stoically informing her “no one is above tradition.” Diana ruefully remarks, “I’m always catching up. Always.” Her children, Prince William and Prince Harry, sense something is deeply troubling Diana but are kept in the dark about their parents’ marital issues. When asked to elaborate, Diana responds: “Here, there is only one tense. There is no future. The past and present are the same thing.” In her socializing with the Royal Family, Diana is constantly out of place. Her food and her schedule are predetermined. She doesn’t even get to pick what she wears—that’s organized by occasion and prepared by her sympathetic but concerned royal dresser Maggie (Sally Hawkins). Diana has no privacy: footmen and servants are a constant presence inside the residence, and outside, Major Gregory warns of paparazzi armed with telephoto lenses. When she fails to close the curtains to her dressing room, the royal staff respond by sewing them shut. At one point, an unraveling Diana clears her bedroom by announcing “Leave, I want to masturbate” to a flummoxed servant. The constant control of her life and the stress of her crumbling marriage exacerbate Diana’s manic depression, causing her to fantasize about self-harm and see visions of Anne Boleyn as her mental health falters. You really aren’t sure what lengths Diana will go to break free from her gilded prison, or how far her sanity will stretch before she breaks.

One minor issue: if you’re seeing this movie without knowing its historical context, you don’t get a sense for *why* Diana is breaking down until at least a fourth of the way through the film. Kristen Stewart commits fully to Diana’s growing instability, but sometimes the script paints Diana as so melodramatic that the points she’s making aren’t taken as seriously as they should be. An overextended pheasant metaphor has the potential for gravitas, yet also includes a scene where Diana monologues to a bird. The head chef is blatantly an operatic Chorus character, going so far to quote Shakespeare in nearly every scene he appears. Yet more depth and finesse is given to Diana’s nemesis, Major Gregory, especially when he empathizes with Diana instead of just trying to contain her.

There are heavy Kubrickian influences throughout the cinematography: lots of panoramic long shots, lengthy takes, a higher ratio of soundtrack to dialogue, and even a surrealistic dream sequence towards the end—but this, and the movie’s discordant, almost neo-noir jazz soundtrack, adds to the film’s psychological horror. *Spencer* is not necessarily an easy watch, but watching Diana slowly break free from the apathy of the institutions that no longer serve her best interests is gratifying. See it and enjoy Stewart’s performance.



The Religious Right Gets More Fringe

by Ryan Crane, FFBC Vice President

It has been apparent to anyone paying attention in recent years that we are becoming more secular, more progressive, and more accepting as a society.

No wonder, then, that there is such a backlash from our friends on the Religious Right! From the My Pillow Guy, to people upset about the Super Bowl Halftime Show, there is currently a strong push to take us backward 60 years or more.

It is interesting that the LGBTQ community has been spared some of the indignities we used to suffer at their hands. There is, however, an exception: transgender athletes in youth sports. It's as though the Religious Right deliberately picked the most vulnerable - the most prone to bullying - and decided to attack them. What a shame.

It falls to activists, advocates, and allies to do much of the heavy lifting in defense of the youngest and most marginalized members of our community. Weirdly, but happily, large corporations may be the ones to help restore some sanity at the Capitol. Currently, Apple is registered in opposition to the bill to ban transgender athletes from competing as their true selves. Good for Apple.

I wish it was about justice and equity and dignity, but it may be about not pissing off huge corporations. Whatever the case, I hope more large businesses join us on the front lines of this narrow battle in the larger culture war.



Funny Irish Sayings

The Emerald Isle is rich with tradition and history. No wonder then that its people have come up with so many memorable sayings. Some of the funniest ones are below for your entertainment.

- As you slide down the banisters of life, may the splinters never point the wrong way.
- May the roof above us never fall in, and may we friends gathered below never fall out.
- Here's that we may always have a clean shirt, a clean conscience, and a guinea in our pocket.
- In the New Year, may your right hand always be stretched out in friendship and never in want.
- May your neighbors respect you, trouble neglect you, the angels protect you, and heaven accept you.
- May your pockets be heavy and your heart be light, may good luck pursue you each morning and night.
- May the sound of happy music, and the lilt of Irish laughter, fill your heart with gladness, that stays forever after.
- May you have the hindsight to know where you've been, the foresight to know where you're going, and the insight to know when you're going too far.
- May the frost never afflict your spuds. May the outside leaves of your cabbage always be free from worms. May the crow never pick your haystack, and may your donkey always be in foal.
- May you be poor in misfortune, rich in blessings, slow to make enemies, quick to make friends. But rich or poor, quick or slow, may you know nothing but happiness from this day forward.
- May your doctor never earn a dollar out of you and may your heart never give out. May the ten toes of your feet steer you clear of all misfortune, and before you're much older, may you hear much better toasts than this.



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Elizabeth and Monty:

The Untold Story of Their

Intimate Friendship

by Charles Casillo



A Book Review by Steve Person

Author Casillo chronicles the friendship between Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift from the late 1940s until Clift's death in 1966. They were verifiably two of the most beautiful people for the better part of two decades. Talented? Yes. Happy? Not so much. Both struggled to break away from their smothering mothers.

Casillo's portrait of the pair would first have a chapter about Monty followed by a chapter about Elizabeth. This motif went on until the two worked together on various film projects, and then followed their experiences as time and circumstances in tandem allowed.

Elizabeth Taylor was born in London in 1932 to two American parents living and working there at the time. Her mother, Sara, was a frustrated actress who even had a somewhat successful Broadway debut at the age of 27. The play, *The Fool*, was a religious drama and Sara even played in it in the West End in London. She felt stardom was inevitable, but it eluded her. Elizabeth's father, Francis, managed a fine art gallery in Mayfair. As a closeted homosexual, Francis had a wealthy English benefactor who was also a Member of Parliament. His name was Victor Cazalet, and he had a passion for fine art and for Francis. Sara didn't mind the relationship and transferred her unfulfilled acting ambitions to her daughter. That explains a lot about Elizabeth's eventual empathy for gay men.

Monty's mother, Sunny, attached herself to Monty after his stint in 1934 as a child actor in summer stock. It didn't take long for fourteen-year-old Monty to make his way to Broadway. His incredible good looks and appealing manner made him easy prey for the older actors he encountered, and Monty couldn't wait to come of age and shed his mother's cloying ways.

Upon their return to America and Los Angeles, Sara became the stereotypical stage mother and hawked Elizabeth's childish yet somewhat mature manner to Hollywood producers. Her tenacity paid off, and Elizabeth became a popular child star. But children grow up, and Elizabeth's only possible way to stop her mother's pushiness was to marry. At age 18, she married Conrad Hilton, Jr., an heir to the Hilton Hotels chain. The disastrous marriage lasted just nine months. By the time of her marriage, Elizabeth and Monty had already completed filming *A Place in the Sun*. It was during that film she fell hopelessly in love with Monty, but his sexuality wouldn't allow him to be anything other than a good friend.

The two stars remained close over the years and had a special relationship that transcended the meaning of "friendship," yet never entered the realm of sexual gratification. Both became alcoholic, abused prescription medications, and had affairs with not the most reliable people. Given the homophobia of the times, Monty refused to allow society to dictate his behavior; Elizabeth sought love and solace in eight marriages with seven husbands, marrying Richard Burton twice.

It is a fascinating book, and the passages describing Monty's horrific car accident after leaving Elizabeth's house after a party May 12, 1956, and Elizabeth's heroic performance in saving his life, make for inspired reading.

Occasionally, I like reading a good Hollywood biography, and there are not too many of those, but this one is first rate.

