



First Friday News & Views

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



September 2022

Volume 27

Issue 9

Next Meeting
**September
2**

7:00 a.m.



Meeting Location

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



September Speaker

**Jamie
Fitzgerald**



FFBC Website

ffbciaowa.org



A Pain in the Neck

by Byron Huff, Board President

Happy September! I want to acknowledge the new photo of me taken by Rocco Cafagna at John Schmacker's home during the FFBC July picnic. The original was a portrait of my husband, Jim Anderson, and myself; I currently have that photo as a profile picture on my Facebook page.

I missed writing an article last month because I had a bicycle accident. I have some bruised nerves that have impacted the strength of my left arm and hand. As I write this, I continue to work at regaining some of that mobility. The following story recounts the fateful evening of my accident as I remember (or don't remember) it.



On Thursday, July 20, I made plans to bike to the Cumming Tap with a group of friends. I have done this a few times before and had a lot of fun riding there and making a stop at Chuck's Stop on the way. Chuck's Stop is a small, covered area with a couple of picnic tables and a statue depicting Chuck holding a bike over his head. It was created by his friends and family as a memorial to Charlie Cutler who had a passion for biking.

The ride to Cumming was uneventful, and a number of people who I had not seen in some time joined us shortly after we arrived at the bar. There was a popular band playing and the usual (Wednesday) taco truck was there. In addition to some cocktails, I had three tacos as I knew I needed to eat something to give me energy to ride home.

On prior rides to Cumming, I have left in plenty of time to be home before dark, and I also usually ride with others. That evening I thought I would stay a little longer because the band was so good, and I thought I would be fine with good lights on my ebike. I decided to head home by myself because I thought I had been there long enough, and I wanted to get home to Jim and Presha (our seven-year-old Morky).

When I left, it was dusk but getting dark quickly. I knew I was rushing because I was later than I had planned. I recall missing a curve, but there is a cut across through the grass that is very rough. I know I hit that going too fast and took a spill, but



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["A Pain in the Neck" continued from page 1]

thought it was nothing serious as I recall getting up as one of my friends asked if I was OK. She asked if I wanted to ride with her, but I took off thinking I was fine to ride the rest of the way.

The next thing I remember is running off the edge of the trail on a curve into the soft, rough material that just seemed to pull me until I went off into the woods. I remember peddling, thinking I could ride through and back up the embankment onto the trail (which may have worked had I not hit a downed tree at fairly fast pace). I remember stopping very quickly and literally falling to my right side and thinking that hurt a lot and that I couldn't get up.

I have a vague recollection of people helping me out of the woods and seeing people around me with flashing lights. There were a couple of very young (per my friends) police officers who seemed intent on making me stand up, which I recall I could only do by hanging onto my bike with one of my friends holding my bike because I was so unstable and disoriented. The police wanted me to go to their car which I could not do. I guess at some point I was allowed to sit/lie down when the paramedics arrived and determined I had a spinal injury. They had to have a four-wheeler brought in to strap me upright with a board on my neck as they took me down the trail to the ambulance located on a nearby road.

I also recall that, before they hauled me off, they were talking about what to do with my bike; the police said they could take it. I commented that it was an expensive bike that I would prefer they not take because I thought I would never see it again. My friends called my friend, the owner of the Cumming Tap (Bob Moral), who left his busy bar to bring his pickup down to get my bike. I am so overwhelmed and grateful I have such a wonderful group of friends who took care of me on that dark trail.

The next thing I recall was in the hospital being examined by a trauma surgeon after an x-ray. He picked up my left arm above my head and asked me to hold it there; my arm immediately dropped onto my face; he then told me I had broken my neck. I was taken to a bed to be monitored, and I recall telling the nurse, Whitney, that I was cold, and she quickly determined my blood pressure was dropping and I was going into shock; I don't know what they did, but I felt better quickly.

Jim arrived with Presha not knowing I was in such serious condition and in the critical care unit (CCU is a step down from the intensive care unit); Presha was very anxious to see me, but unhappy I had a contraption wrapped around my body and neck.

The doctors then ordered a CT-scan and MRI on me as they determined what other damage had occurred. The MRI revealed that one of four veins in my neck leading to my brain was bleeding, which meant an increased risk of a stroke. The treatment for that would simply be an aspirin every day for 60 days when they will do another MRI with the hope it has repaired itself.

I was held in CCU as they tried to secure a neurosurgeon to repair my fractured discs. Later Thursday, I was told my surgery

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Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for introducing **Jerry Hatfield**, our August 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 **October newsletter** will be **September 26**. 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.



Fundraising efforts are ongoing to fund our scholarship program. To date we have raised over **\$475,000** 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.





Future Speakers

October 7: Dana Cardin

Retired KCCI Reporter and Asst. News Director

November 4: Mike Franken

Democratic Candidate for U.S. Senate

December 2:

Rev. Rushing Kimball

Plymouth UCC

January 6: Matt Sinovic

Executive Director of Progress Iowa

"September"

by Ted Hughes [1930 – 1998]



We sit late, watching the dark slowly unfold:
No clock counts this.

When kisses are repeated and the arms hold
There is no telling where time is.

It is midsummer: the leaves hang big and still:
Behind the eye a star,
Under the silk of the wrist a sea, tell
Time is nowhere.

We stand; leaves have not timed the summer.
No clock now needs
Tell we have only what we remember:
Minutes uproaring with our heads

Like an unfortunate King's and his Queen's
When the senseless mob rules;
And quietly the trees casting their crowns
Into the pools.

["A Pain in the Neck" continued from page 2]

would be on Friday; until then I had to remain completely still, flat on a bed. I can tell you that the pain of lying in the same position for over 24 hours should be classified as torture. The braces I wore, and continue to wear, I believe, were invented in medieval times to torture enemy captives.

The success of the surgery allowed me to be moved directly to a regular bed in the hospital where I stayed until I was able to stand and walk on my own; that happened very quickly because I was anxious to go home. They finally got the surgeon's ok for my release on Sunday afternoon. I credit my years of yoga with providing me the core strength to quickly regain my sense of balance.



I hope I haven't been too long winded, but I wanted to put my experience out there and help everyone understand my absence from FFBC. I continue to improve with lots of muscle issues due to inactivity and the need to wear a neck brace 24 hours a day and a body brace whenever I am at anything more than a 30 degree angle. It is not recommended that I drive for obvious reasons and I wear out quickly, but I hope that will change at my next appointment with my neurosurgeon on August 29 when they will determine if there has been enough healing to remove the braces.

Thank you everyone for the get well blessings! Your love and caring continue to help me get through this difficult time.



The Way It Works

by Jonathan Wilson



Record inflation has been much in the news, understandably. Inflation hurts everyday Americans and creates more challenges in their lives every day. The labor market is seeing wage increases, but those have not kept up with the near-term inflation that is happening. If inflation were only hitting the price of luxury yachts, it would impact very few people, there would be little sympathy for them, and it would have almost zero political significance. Hitting the price of everyday necessities like groceries, clothing, airfare, and fuel, inflation necessarily has political consequences because people are motivated to vote their pocketbooks.

What has caused it? Several things coalesced to cause the inflation we're experiencing: the pandemic that put the brakes on the economy and disrupted the supply chain, the federal government pumping money into the economy to reduce the impact of the economic slowdown, the war in Ukraine that disrupted fuel supplies, greed, and politics.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic slammed the brakes on the world-wide economy, including in the United States. That prompted the federal government to pump liquidity into the economy by sending out \$1,400 checks to just about everyone. It had the desired impact of giving at least short-term relief to everyday Americans; those Americans, in turn, spent the money on everyday things, thus propping up the economy. It preserved jobs that would otherwise have been lost, but spending that money created demand for goods and services. Because of the world-wide pandemic, supply chains across the globe were disrupted. When supplies can't keep up with demand, for whatever reason, inflation follows like night follows day. As the economy regained strength, pent-up demand has erupted against the disrupted supply chain, a surefire prescription for inflation.

Efforts initiated to fix the supply chain disruptions have been complicated by the continuing impact of the pandemic among foreign suppliers – most notably, China. The U.S. had no ability to influence the way China chose to combat the disease, including the virtual shutting down of export ports.

While the complicated efforts to fix the supply chain were continuing, the war in Ukraine happened and is ongoing with no end in sight. That, in turn, has undermined confidence regarding fuel supplies. That compromised confidence has triggered inflation in fuel prices. Inflation in the price of fuel is particularly problematic because it

ripples through the economy and impacts the price of nearly all other goods -- goods that were already inflated in price due to pent-up demand and insufficient supplies.

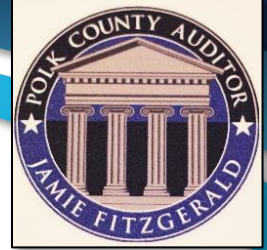
Then enter greed. In the midst of demand exceeding available supply, corporations had little-to-no constraint on price gouging, which they have done with a vengeance (partly to recoup diminished profits caused by the pandemic slow-down, coupled with the fiduciary duty to maximize profits for their shareholders). That has made company profits set records.

Finally, politics entered the equation. In a country as closely divided politically as ours is, those out of power recognize that people generally "vote their pocketbooks," reducing any incentive Republicans in Congress have for cooperating in finding a bipartisan solution. It's borderline miraculous that the Biden Administration and Democrats in Congress were able to push through the Inflation Reduction Act. Despite the name, which was necessary to help get it passed, the law would invest considerably in climate-changing emissions of carbon into the atmosphere. In the nearer term (but not before the midterm elections), it will limit to \$2,000 annually the out-of-pocket expense of drugs for senior citizens on Medicare. It sets a minimum 15% tax rate for large corporations and provides funding to enable the IRS to up its game in tax collection operations.

Taming inflation is obviously a challenging proposition and beyond any quick or easy solution. The FED raising interest rates is a sledgehammer approach that will eventually help, but not in the near term. Inflation is also influenced by the continuing pandemic (and more variants on the way world-wide), continued disruptions in supply chains and fuel supplies, greed of large corporations, and politics in Washington, D.C. Particularly, politics in Washington, D.C.

The Inflation Reduction Act will not do all that much about inflation before the midterm elections, despite its name. The substance of the legislation, however, will be a good thing for the country in the long term, and reduce U.S. budget deficits to boot.

September Speaker



Jamie Fitzgerald

Jamie Fitzgerald has served as Polk County Auditor and Commissioner of Elections since January 2007. His office is responsible for a wide variety of functions, ranging from paying all of Polk County's bills to conducting elections in Iowa's largest county.

As County Auditor, one of Fitzgerald's top priorities has been utilizing technology and increasing efficiency to benefit Polk County residents. This includes making all Board of Supervisor meeting materials digital and putting all audio of Board meetings online. Fitzgerald's office has also worked to place more than 100 years of Board meeting minutes online for the public to view and re-recorded all audio from the past meetings. As Commissioner of Elections, Fitzgerald oversees all elections in Polk County and maintains records for more than 300,000 registered voters.

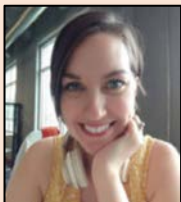
Fitzgerald received his Associate of Arts degree from Iowa Central Community College in 1992 and a Bachelor of Arts from Iowa State University in 1994. He added a Certified Public Manager Certificate from Drake University in 2010. In 2019, Fitzgerald earned professional election certification through the national Election Center and Auburn University as a Certified Elections and Registration Administrator (CERA).



popinjaypress.com

Editor's Note:

*April was a student of FFBC Newsletter editor, Wade Petersen. When she told me about her plans to start a company to produce inclusive books for children with customizable characters for any family, not only was I excited, but incredibly **proud**. If you have young kids (or grandkids) in your life, please consider supporting Iowa-based Popinjay Press as they publish diverse and inclusive children's books. You can find more information and place orders at the Popinjay website listed above. Thanks, April!
You are amazing!*



Customizable Books for Every Family

With the option to feature same-sex parents, interracial couples, grandparents, stepparents, nonbinary characters, foster siblings, cousins and more, **Popinjay Press** books can be **customized** to represent virtually every family dynamic in existence. And the colorful, imaginative, funny stories can help every child take pride in their wonderfully unique family. So what if you have two moms? or two dads? So what if your pronouns are "they/them"? You're worthy just the way you are, and you deserve a place in literature too. That's why we need great storybooks for kids that also can reflect diverse families (including LGBTQ ones!).

Popinjay Press was founded by **April Pearson-Decklever**, a proud mom and stepmom who wanted to see her modern family represented in the children's books she read to her kids. When she couldn't find any, she decided to create her own! But she didn't stop there. She brought on amazing, wonderful, talented collaborators, and together they formed Popinjay Press. Sharing a creative vision, love of children, and passion for social justice, these authors and illustrators are as proud as popinjays to offer you a growing library that celebrates diversity and inclusivity. They chose Popinjay Press for the company name because popinjays are proud, vibrant creatures with light hearts and quirky personalities — sound like a family you know?



Jerry Hatfield Gives Us The "Dirt" on Climate

by Gary Moore

I continue to be amazed at the quality and breadth of knowledge of the speakers for the First Friday Breakfast Club. This first Friday of August, 30+ members present and additional members attending via Zoom had the opportunity to hear and learn from **Jerry Hatfield**, Ph.D., retired Director of the USDA-ARS National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment. His research has focused on the interactions among the components of the soil-plant-atmosphere continuum and their linkage to air, water, and soil quality. It has provided a framework for producers to demonstrate how they can increase their production efficiency, increase soil health, and develop resilience to weather and climate variation as the foundation for food security.

As Wade Petersen, retired educator, said in his introduction of Jerry Hatfield, his emphasis has always been on lifelong learning. Members present got a short but dynamic presentation on climate change in **agroclimatology** and its implications for food security. I cannot emphasize the amount of information FFBC members received in this 30-minute presentation and highly recommend you spend some time listening to the presentation once it is available on the FFBC website. I cannot give Dr. Hatfield's presentation justice in this short article.

For instance, just a few tidbits from his presentation: Did you know that cherry trees need cooling during the nonproductive season with temps going below 42 degrees? If the tree does not get this cooling period, its production is severely affected. When you take into the life of cherry trees, needing to mature five years for productivity, a life span of 30-40 years, and the changing climate in micro-areas, you start to get the complexity of planning for the future of this one crop. Cherry cold requirements are generally between 800 and 1,200 hours. Knowing how many chill hours for cherries is necessary will depend on the cultivar, but for most types, in order to get the maximum yield of flowers and fruits, at least 1,000 hours is important. Read more at *Gardening Know How: Cherry Cold Requirements: How Many Chill Hours For Cherries* <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/.../chill-hours-for...>

When talking about various crops, the optimum timing of rain events differs for each crop. The importance of rain at various developmental stages of the crops is different. We are seeing extreme rain events intensify. An extreme event is anything over two inches. The most recent extreme example is the flooding going on in Kentucky. Yet we are seeing summer rainfall less reliable and the bookend of crops, planting season, and harvest time becoming wetter when wet fields do not help the farmer.



In addition, like humans, crops need a cooling-off period during the evening hours. We are seeing hotter nights which have different effects on various crops. So we are seeing how weather, management, quality of the soil, and water management all affect crops and our food security. Water seems to be the biggest of these predictors, but all have their impact on production and then profitability.

The changing weather patterns are pushing warmer weather in some areas farther north which also then affects the introduction of various crop pests and their influence. What are some of the crops being influenced greatly by changing weather patterns for areas? Grapes, coffee, cocoa, cherries. Can you imagine when the production of these crops, their location, time developing the crop, are all influenced by the changing weather patterns due to climate change can have on millions of lives due to location, expense in raising the crop, and changing price patterns are going to have on the planet? It is mind-boggling.

Again, I can only emphasize how Dr. Hatfield clearly tied a lot of ribbons up in an easily understood presentation.



August Speaker Jerry Hatfield



August Meeting Photo Gallery



August Meeting Photo Gallery



Photos by
Wade Petersen
& Gary Moore

Monkeypox Stigmatization

by Supervisor Matt McCoy, Polk County, 5th District



“Stigma and discrimination can be as dangerous as any virus.” Those are the words from the WHO Director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared monkeypox a public health emergency. An NPR article I recently read eloquently describes the unique juxtaposition we’re in: The WHO emergency committee that had previously considered whether to issue such a declaration was unable to reach a consensus in part because of concerns about the risk of stigma, marginalization, and discrimination against the communities hit the hardest by the virus (a.k.a. the LGBTQ+ community). We all know how the LGBTQ+ community was treated during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 90s, and now we’re faced with another stigmatization.

The article further states that the global monkeypox outbreak appears to mostly affect men who have sex with other men. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that 98% of people diagnosed with the virus between April and June in more than a dozen countries identify as gay or bisexual men, and the WHO says that 99% of U.S. cases are related to male-to-male sexual contact.



Monkeypox is much more easily spreadable than other diseases. Public health experts stress that monkeypox is relevant to everyone, since it can spread through skin-to-skin contact and potentially contaminated objects like clothing or towels. Jason Cianciotto, a vice president of Gay Men’s Health Crisis, said, “It doesn’t necessarily have to be sexual: cuddling, massage, sharing bedding or towels that have come in contact with pustules. Even if you’re fully clothed, if you’re on the dance floor or dancing close to someone, there is the possibility of transmission.” However, Dr. Ai Khan, formerly working for the CDC, who has studied outbreaks in Indiana and the Democratic Republic of Congo, said 95% of infections are transmitted by sexual contact. Cianciotto gave sage advice: 1. Don’t panic; 2. If you have flu-like symptoms or start to see a rash, seek medical attention and stay home (similar to how we treat COVID-19); 3. Just to care for each other.

The U.S. has a severe shortage of monkeypox vaccine with the federal government doling it to larger cities that have higher concentrations of gay men. Iowa, and particularly Polk County, did receive some vaccines but only a small portion of what’s needed. As the vaccine becomes available in Polk County, please check back at this link often to find appointments at www.immunizepolk.com. As the vaccine becomes more plentiful, get educated and get the vaccine.



“The Lord is my shepherd, and He knows I’m gay.”

(Troy Perry)

Want to Join the Chorus?

You've heard us, you've seen us, and you've thought that maybe you would love to join our family! Our new season begins with rehearsals on Monday, September 12. Contact Wade Petersen, Operations Manager, at info@dmgmc.org for more information.

We welcome anyone, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, who can sing in the tenor and bass ranges. There is no audition, but you must be vaccinated to join the Chorus!



DES MOINES GAY MEN'S CHORUS

Life in Drag

by William (Bill) Brown



On my Saturday morning TV shows in the 1950s, I was absorbed with the child, female actresses. As time went by, I also watched Milton Berle and Flip Wilson do comic drag. I remember, at seven years of age, putting on my grandmother's big hat and parading it on the sidewalk of our street. In sixth grade at Halloween time, I remember the costumes and how one male student came dressed as the character Klinger from the TV show *M*A*S*H*. The teacher loved it and said as much. I appeared just in drag, not as anyone identifiable; the teacher was not amused with me. I didn't get it.

As an adult living in New York City, I had a wonderful coworker and friend who occasionally performed his job as a bartender in a well-known gay bar...in drag. Everyone back then was watching Joan Collins as Alexis on *Dynasty*, and my bartender friend had her down pat! My first drag performance was as "**Audrey**" at a New York City club called The Anvil with drag shows for three terrific performers at 5 a.m.

Back in Des Moines, there was City Disco Park and a few others where the 70s Queens entertained. I also performed at one called The Brass Garden as "**Dora Lee Rabinowitz**." After 17 years in New Mexico, I returned to Des Moines in 2008. I did my own show once at The Blazing Saddle where many of my friends from Buddy's next door asked me to "do my thing" over there. I did and "**Samantha Jo Blessing**" was "born." My now deceased younger sister "Bex" (Becky) came to all my shows at Buddy's and loved everyone and especially Bud Shaw (the owner).

I've done a few shows for "Cougar Cabaret" at the new Garden club. My drag characters let me explore many aspects of myself that I wouldn't have done otherwise.



They/Them

A Movie Review by Mark Turnage



While queerness and horror have had a longstanding cinematic relationship, queer horror films are still a burgeoning genre. It's also very delicate territory—queer culture has its own set of collective traumas that, when approached, must be handled gracefully for a story involving them to be taken seriously. With a horror film, the audience has an awareness that some characters, perhaps all of them, will be menaced by a powerful, malevolent entity and meet violent ends. With a queer horror film, the story also needs to go another step further, reframing and confronting queer trauma in ways that are savvy, inventive, and most of all, scary. *They/Them*, directed by John Logan in his feature film debut, is thoughtful when it comes to honoring and celebrating the queerness of its characters and offering commentary on queer culture; unfortunately, its ambition is axed by its own devotion to slasher genre conventions and a clumsy plot.

They/Them follows Jordan (Theo Germaine), a trans, non-binary teenager part of a busload of LGBTQ teens attending Whistler Camp, a conversion therapy program. Nearly all of them are there at the behest of their parents, in exchange for anything from concert tickets to avoiding homelessness to emancipation from their families. We meet the camp director Owen Whistler (Kevin Bacon), who skips any religious zealotry and bizarrely claims the camp as a “safe space,” insisting the staff has no problem with LGBT people. Initially, the depiction of Whistler Camp is not so much a traditional conversion therapy program trying to change a person's sexuality, but instead is a *gender* conversion therapy camp, intended to reinforce heteronormative gender expression. When queer attraction is expressed heteronormatively at Whistler Camp—e.g. pairs of masculine men or feminine women—the camp staff (also former program “graduates”) are not only willing to let it slide, but they also participate in that attraction themselves (often in disturbing ways). But this isn't commentary on the straight community—it's a barb at our own “masc for masc” or “femme for femme” dating culture. *They/Them* has a few savvy moments like this. In one scene that's a tongue-in-cheek commentary on trans youth participation in sports, Jordan is challenged by Zane, the hypermasculine activities director, after the “boys” group is given rifles for target practice. Jordan demonstrates better marksmanship thanks to their skill and military upbringing, which infuriates Zane especially after Whistler says Jordan beat him “fair and square.” There's also a tender and uplifting moment after a particularly intense “therapy” session where the campers dance and sing to Pink's “Perfect” to support Jordan. Quei Tann's portrayal of Alexandra, a black trans woman and Jordan's most empathic ally, is easily the film's strongest acting performance.

But sadly, *They/Them* is done in by its own slasher antagonist, and trying to conform its queer dramedy to that genre. Forty-five minutes into the film (half its runtime), we have seen the masked cloak-clad slasher twice, with a body count of one. The plot compensates by giving them a “rampage” in the final act and tying their identity back into its main themes, but by the time this happens, the Whistler Camp staff have also inexplicably switched direction—into a one-note conversion therapy camp trying to change its campers' sexual identities. It's like the final act remembered it was a slasher movie and compensated by dumbing down. The conversion therapy camp setting is a problem too, just not in the obvious ways you'd expect. It tells us what we already know—conversion therapy is torture and ruins lives—but doesn't reframe or confront that subject with the same intent it does for its characters and their relatable LGBT experiences.

They/Them should be commended for its celebration of queer identities and for the ground it breaks in telling their stories, but as a slasher movie, it doesn't quite make the cut.

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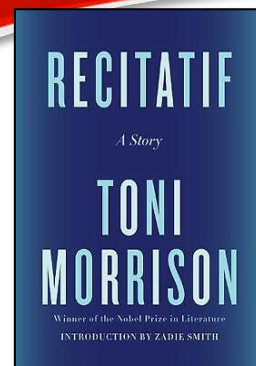
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Recitatif

by Toni Morrison

A Book
Review by
Steve Person



A good friend of mine is in a book club, and their current selection is *Recitatif* by Toni Morrison. It was originally published in 1983 and is the only short story Toni Morrison ever wrote. My friend lent the book to me in its current 2022 rendition of the story. She said to read the Introduction before reading the actual story. Zadie Smith wrote the introduction in 2022. The Introduction is 43 pages while the actual story is just 39 pages. I decided to stop reading her introduction about halfway into it. Why? Smith kept quoting passages from the story and then positing her interpretation of Morrison's meanings. I felt I needed to get the story first and then finish the Introduction. I believe Smith's essay should have been published in this rendition of the story as an Afterword rather than an Introduction.

Smith noted that most writers of fiction begin their careers with short stories before eventually graduating to full-length novels. Morrison, she points out, wrote full-length prose before producing this short story. What did Morrison mean with the title she chose? *Recitatif* has two meanings: 1) Musical declamation of the kind usual in the narrative and dialogue parts of opera and oratorio, sung in rhythm of ordinary speech with many words on the same note: *singing in recitative*. 2) The tone or rhythm peculiar to any language *obs*. She left it up to the reader to determine which meaning to employ.

I have to admit that I am not a fan of Morrison's writing. Despite the fact that Morrison received, among other accolades, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993, I find her writing style difficult to decipher. I suspect that's because I have limited knowledge of the racial problems African Americans experience. So, the fault is mine, not hers.

The story chronicles a three-decades look at the lives of two girls: Roberta and Twyla. One of them is white and the other black. The two girls meet when they are just eight years old and find themselves in an orphanage but only for four months. Neither girl is an orphan in the true sense of that word. Both have mothers who are alive and about as different as two women can be. Those four months set the tone for the subsequent experiences the two girls encounter in their adult lives for the upcoming decades.

Morrison never lets the reader know which girl is white and which is black. It is her genius as a writer that she endows each of them with behaviors that could be those of a white person or those of a black person.

After the orphanage, they meet again years later in a chance encounter in upstate New York where Twyla is working as a waitress at a Howard Johnsons restaurant and Roberta is a customer traveling with a rock band. The awkward situation is never resolved, and it is many years later that they meet again and take opposite sides in a mothers' protest, both pro and con, over the issue of busing school children from their respective neighborhoods to achieve racial balance in schools. The story is a thoughtful and sometimes difficult-to-interpret rendition of America in the middle twentieth century. It is definitely food for thought.