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First Friday News & Views

Bigot: Name calling or Well-deserved Label

by Jonathan Wilson

Now I think I've heard it all. Maybe I've said that before, but I really mean it this time.

It was just reported that heterosexual bigots in Provincetown are complaining about "intolerant" gay folks. Locals there have said that the intolerance from those who have long pleaded for tolerance has arisen because of disagreement over Massachusetts becoming the first state to legalize same-gender marriage.

Apparently, some heterosexual bigots felt comfortable signing a petition seeking a constitutional amendment banning such marriages; comfortable, that is, until their names and addresses were published and the public, including some cheeky gay people, found out who they are and where they live. Forty-three live in Provincetown and found themselves the target of taunts and "breeder" name-calling. One signer complained that she was berated as a bigot by a gay man. Some nerve.

One thing about bigots, like gay people, you can't usually tell they are bigots just by looking at them. But that's where the similarities end, abruptly. No one claims to have been born a bigot. So it was a tremendous convenience when "knowthyneighbor" (see www.knowthyneighbor.com) began publishing names and addresses of those who sign anti-gay petitions of one kind or another. No more guess work. We get outed; they get outed. Fair's fair.

The local Rev. Henry J. Dahl said he objects to equating opposition to same-gender marriage with bigotry. "I'll take ownership of being a Catholic and being a signer of the petition, but I won't take ownership of being a bigot," he said. I say, "If the shoe fits, wear it. And whether you take 'ownership' of it or not, you are one."

Bigotry is not a popular word, and that's as it should be. But it's important to understand what bigotry is in order to appreciate why it should be unpopular. I think bigotry is arrogant ignorance. It's forming an opinion about someone else that is based on false information, and clinging to that opinion tenaciously, pridefully, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It might be motivated by a misreading of the Bible. It might be engendered by affection for tradition for tradition's sake, or social conditioning. It might be prompted by reluctance about change toward the unfamiliar. It might be caused by the very human need of inferior people to feel superior to *someone, anyone*. Whatever the motivation, bigotry is not and should not be a flattering thing, and it's understandable that someone would want to avoid the label. Rev. Dahl, I know of no bigot that proudly claims the name. So, there either are no bigots, or bigots like Rev. Dahl just shun the title they so richly deserve.

Mere ignorance is forgivable. Mere ignorance doesn't have a malevolent edge to it. Mere ignorance should be tolerated, at least long enough to allow for education to take place. Proudful ignorance need not be tolerated, should not be tolerated. And it's perhaps the height of bigotry to claim a right to "tolerance" on a supposed par with the "tolerance" that is increasingly being sought, yeah demanded, by well-adjusted, law-abiding, tax paying, out, gay children of God and fellow citizens. There is a huge difference between demands for tolerance regarding a

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CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, September 1 at Hoyt Sherman Place.
- Our guest speaker will be Dr. Nancy Sebring, Superintendent of the Des Moines Public Schools.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, August 29 to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com or 288-2500 by phone.

personal characteristic that is or should be irrelevant in matters of housing, employment, education, public accommodations of every sort, and civil equality, on the one hand, and tolerance of offensive, ill-informed, unenlightened ideas in the democratic marketplace of ideas, on the other. It's one thing to expect tolerance for mere cultural differences or differing religious choices, and another to ask for tolerance, a pass as it were, for stubborn stupidity.

Should the early Christians, hiding in the catacombs of the Roman Empire, have shown "tolerance" toward those who oppressed their religious choice? Should the Jews of Nazi Germany have shown "tolerance" toward the Gestapo? Should women have shown "tolerance" toward those who insisted (and some still do) that the Bible dictates their subordinate status? Should the African-American friends and families of the lynched show "tolerance" toward the lynch mob? Should we show "tolerance" toward the 6 out of ten people on the street who don't recognize or express support for our Bill of Rights? Should the ideas of members of the Flat Earth Society enjoy the "tolerance" of those who view the created Universe based on science or maybe a photograph taken from the moon? Should the teacher "tolerate" wrong answers on the test?

Those who choose to participate in a vibrant democracy, need to be prepared for criticism. Those who advocate for discrimination unsupported by reason (i.e., it's perfectly okay to discriminate against convicted criminals), should

expect criticism. I don't care whether being gay is a choice (in which case it's like choosing to be a Catholic), or is genetically based (in which case it's like race), or is some combination of the two (in which case it's like a well-adjusted gay person *choosing* not to marry an unsuspecting straight person). The debate is irrelevant when deciding who is entitled to equal treatment under the law.

Calling someone a bigot for clinging to ignorance about others is not an exercise in mere name calling; it's calling a spade, a spade. Those who cling to the First Century notion that all God's children are straight and same-gender intimacy is simply straight folks acting out are arrogantly ignorant. Calling them "breeders" is name calling; calling them "bigots" is simply saying what they are.



—Jonathan Wilson

Gay Games 2006

by Jeffrey Campbell and Friedhelm Brinkhaus



It was refreshing to see so many athletes from the gay community at one location; it was uplifting; "the city was very welcoming;" and "the volleyball tournament was the most memorable experience;" and there was so much competitiveness and unity". These were Jeffrey's comments when I asked him recently about some of the things running through his mind during the Gay Games 2006. Let's back up.

We missed the opening ceremony, and as we found out later, we didn't miss much. We arrived in Chicago on a hot July day. Jeffrey had to register for the tennis tournament at the downtown Hilton where hundreds of gay athletes from all over the world had already congregated to obtain badges, bags, and information. Everything seemed to be well-organized, with spontaneity added ("I need three volunteers and they will be moved to the front of the line"). From there we walked to Soldier Field where participants were to gather at 5 p.m. for a ceremony to start at 8 p.m. We tried in vain to obtain a \$30 spectator ticket (nobody knew where the box office was). Since we were getting hot and there was too much time to kill until the beginning of the ceremony, we left to check on our suburban hotel accommodations. We never made it back into the city that evening.

Throughout the week we heard from many disappointed athletes and participants about the opening ceremony: "way too long (it was over after midnight); too many speeches (more than twenty speakers); and depressing (overriding theme was exclusion and seclusion)." So we had few misgivings about missing out on the event.

However, the week turned out to be exciting and thoroughly enjoyable. Athletic events took place throughout the city in five "sports villages," with tennis at Northwestern University and volleyball at Navy Pier. There was everything from ice skating to track-and-field, and we had to be selective so as not to spend too much time in traffic. Jeffrey was to play on Sunday morning. He did not advance; he was outclassed by his opponent in the 40+ category. But he actually played in the Gay Games.

That day and the next we watched tennis, talked to athletes and, occasionally, we took a peak at the ice skaters who were practicing in the same facility. We were amazed over the skill level of some of the skaters and the diversity of competitors.

(Continued from page 2)

Tuesday was a really hot day, and we spent some time at the Field Museum and watched the volleyball tournament at Navy Pier in air conditioned comfort. It was fun to observe the competitiveness and camaraderie, and the level of skill was impressive. There were a good many spectators, and everybody was cheering for their favorite team.

One of the highlights for us was the Wednesday night music festival in the Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park. The Jay Pritzker Pavilion is the largest open-air pavilion in the country, and the architecture is fantastic. The Grant Park Orchestra and Chorus performed Carl Orff's Carmina Burana, followed by a Sing-out, "When the world sings. . .," performed by several gay ensembles and individual gay performers.

Both Jeff and I came away from the Gay Games '06 with lasting impressions. The City of Chicago was very welcoming and showcased the various lake-front venues from Navy Pier to Soldier Field. The Gay Games 2010 will be in Cologne, Germany.

—Jeffrey Campbell & Friedhelm Brinkhaus

Speaker Review

by Bruce Carr

August's guest speaker was Terry Rich, CEO since 2003 of the Blank Park



IOWA'S WILDEST ADVENTURE

Zoo. Rich's high-energy speech included a quick history of the Zoo—first founded in 1963 by Des Moines philanthropist A.H. Blank—but outlined primarily the innovative thinking that has characterized the operations of the Zoo Foundation Board of Directors in the 21st Century.

The mission of the Blank Park Zoo is "to inspire an appreciation of the natural world through conservation, education, and recreation." Among the conservation activities that Rich mentioned is the American Zoo and Aquarium Association's (AZA's) Species Survival Plan to help ensure the survival of selected wildlife species, in part through scientifically-controlled, managed breeding programs as a hedge against extinction. The Blank Park Zoo currently participates in six endangered species breeding programs in cooperation with other AZA-accredited institutions. Animals at the Zoo that are part of an SSP program include ring-tailed lemurs, snow leopard, Amur tiger, Japanese macaque, reticulated giraffe, and bongo antelope.

Educational activities form the heart of the Zoo's life, he said. Details of these events are available on the Zoo's at-

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com no later than Tuesday, August 29 for the September 1 meeting. Our speaker will be Dr. Nancy Sebring, the new Des Moines Superintendent of Schools. Jonathan can also be reached by phone at 288-2500.



Thanks to Allen Vander Linden for hosting the August meeting in Jonathan's absence, and also thanks to Eric Burmeister for his introduction of August's speaker, Terry Rich, CEO of the Blank Park Zoo.



PROS for September

The PROS party for September will be at the home of Patrick Phillips and Denny Schrock on Saturday, September 23, from 6:30-10:00 p.m. at 4714 148th Street. There will be lots of food and beverages, and the garden will be open for tours. Whether you're celebrating Fall Equinox, Rosh Hashanah, Ramadan, or National Chocolate Day, come join us for a fun time.

PROS is a gay social organization that meets 6 times per year. Membership is \$50 per year, or you may attend individual events by paying \$10 at the door. Please call 515-986-3966 or email dennyschrock@msn.com by September 15 to reserve a spot at the party. Contact Denny at the same phone or email for more information about PROS or to get directions.



The Iowa State Fair Board selected COUNTY POEMS OF IOWA (by FFBC member Jay Thompson) to debut as a performance at the Fair on Sunday August 20. The publication includes one poem dedicated to each of Iowa's 99 counties. This was also the first time Iowans could purchase the hard-cover first edition. You may purchase a copy at your local book store.

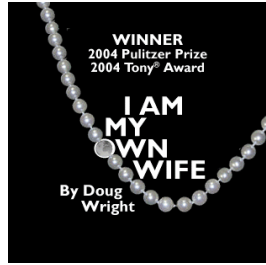
tractive and information-packed Web page, www.blankparkzoo.com. Summer Safari Day Camp, Behind the Scenes, and Zoo Tots are just a few of the activities available.

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I AM MY OWN WIFE

Central
Iowa
Premiere



Theater ... for a change (TFAC) proudly presents the central Iowa premiere of the 2004 Tony Award winning play I Am My Own Wife September 7-17, 2006, at the Viking Theatre of Grand View College.

Doug Wright's I Am My Own Wife tells the story of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf's survival during both the Nazi and Soviet regimes in East Germany—from WWII through the fall of the Berlin Wall. Winner of the 2004 Tony Award for Best Play, Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and many other awards, I Am My Own Wife is the riveting biography of a transvestite who manages to save thousands of artifacts from pre-Nazi Germany and creates a sanctuary in the basement of her home for the people the regimes viewed as undesirable. After it all, as a cultural ambassador, she was honored with the "Verdienstkreuz," Germany's highest civil award, in 1993.

Dean R. Krouch (Angels In America, The Goat, Or Who Is Sylvia?) portrays all 36 characters in this one man tour-de-force which unveils the many secrets and controversies of Charlotte's life.

Helen Hayes-nominated Sound Designer, Ryan Rumery, returns from New York to design sound and compose original music for I Am My Own Wife. Award-winning Scenic Designer Paul Pape's miniatures, used for the original run of I Am My Own Wife at the La Jolla Playhouse, will be featured in this production.

I Am My Own Wife is the first directorial collaboration of Ron Ziegler (The Foreigner, Pump Boys and the Dinettes) and Thatcher Williams (Copenhagen, Clarence Darrow).

Learn more about TFAC, I Am My Own Wife and TFAC's third season at www.theaterforachange.com. Performances: September 7-17, 2006, Thu-Sat 7:30 p.m., Sun 3:00 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for General Admission, available on line at www.IowaTIX.com or at the door the night of performance. Viking Theatre of Grand View College at 2811 East 14th St., Des Moines, IA 50316. ▼

ABOUT TFAC:

TFAC is the not-for-profit theatre company in residence at the Viking Theatre. Founded in 2004, TFAC's mission is to empower all Iowans, artists, and audience, with greater opportunities to interact by:

1. Expanding public awareness of theatre throughout Iowa by focusing on economically diverse communities and neighborhoods.
2. Creating a wide variety of affordable professional productions that enrich and entertain.
3. Providing educational workshops to inspire and nurture Iowa youth and adults.

2006-2007 SEASON:

I Am My Own Wife

September 7-17, 2006

Laughter On The 23rd Floor

December 7-17, 2006

Corleone: The Shakespearean Godfather

January 11-21, 2007

Taming Of The Shrew & Twelfth Night

June 14-24, 2007

(Continued from page 3)

Targeted emphasis on the recreational mission seems the most innovative of the new CEO's ideas. Drawing on his background as a TV producer, entrepreneur, and marketer, Rich is building on the Zoo's already established position as the state's second-most attended entertainment destination (after the State Fair) to open the 22-acre site outside of regular hours (10 to 5 every day) for private and public social events, parties, and charitable galas.

Answering questions at the end, Terry Rich noted that the Foundation Board had indeed considered seriously the idea of moving the Zoo to a more central location—but decided against it after cost analysis showed that growing in place would produce twice as much benefit per dollar as moving.

—Bruce Carr

Preview of 2006-07 Season for StageWest

by Brad Holland



In

2006-2007, StageWest will celebrate 10 years with 5 exceptional productions of progressive theater! Season subscriptions are now on sale: \$90 for all five shows – any performance, and \$60 for all five shows – Wednesday and Thursday nights only. Subscribers receive a discounted rate over the price of an individual show. Season ticket subscribers are also seated before general ticket holders. To obtain tickets, contact StageWest at 309-0251 or at www.stagewestiowa.com.

Now, on with the shows...

Urinetown: The Musical will open the season with performances Sept 22-24, Sept 27-Oct 1 and Oct 4-8, 2006. A 2002 winner of three Tony Awards, Urinetown is a very funny tale of paying to pee. A hero emerges to lead a revolt as a crippling water shortage makes peeing a privilege strictly regulated by Urine Good Company. Director: Thomas Perrine. Central Iowa premiere!

The Women of Lockerbie will be performed November 3-5 and 8-12, 2006. The stage is set in the hills of Lockerbie, Scotland, several years after terrorists have brought down Pan Am Flight 103. This drama captures the story of a New Jersey woman in search of her son's remains encountering local Scottish women attempting to convert an act of hatred into an act of love. This winner of a Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays is an Iowa premiere production brought to you by StageWest under the direction of Ron Gilbert.

Metamorphoses is a joint production with the Des Moines Playhouse. The dates are January 5-7, 10-14, 17-21, 24-28 and January 31-February 4, 2007. An actual pool will be constructed on stage to retell the myths of Ovid – where gods frolic with mortals! This "wet" and wonderful production is sure to chase away your winter blues. Director: John Viars. Again, a central Iowa premiere.

Angels in America – Part One: Millennium Approaches and Part Two: Perestroika. Brought back by popular demand – Part One will be performed by the same brilliant cast

from last season! Then picking up where Millennium Approaches leaves off, director Todd Buchacker and the cast will continue Pulitzer Prize-winning Tony Kushner's story of AIDS in the age of Reagan. In a truly spectacular theatrical event – on one Saturday in March the cast will perform both plays in repertory. A truly remarkable feat few theaters in the country have presented. Come see why Jeffrey Bruner of the Des Moines Register called Millennium Approaches "one of the five best theatre events of the year in Des Moines." The dates will cover three weeks in March. Part One: March 1-3, March 10 (Saturday matinee) and March 11, 2007.

Part Two: March 7-10 and March 14-18, 2007. This production is made possible in large part because of a generous sponsorship from Simonson & Associates Architects, LLC (FFBC member Mike Simonson).

The final production will be The Underpants by Steve Martin. Yes, the wild and crazy guy, Steve Martin, has adapted a classic German comedy by Carl Sternheim to create a funny tale of sex, lies, and lingerie! The Underpants is a comic tale of what can happen when a neglected housewife lets it all hang out. Performances are scheduled for May 4-6 and 9-13, 2006. Another Central Iowa premiere; directed by Maxwell Schaeffer.

Again, tickets are available by contacting StageWest at 309-0251 or at www.stagewestiowa.com.

Earlier in 2006, I was pleased to bring Leaving Iowa to the attention of FFBC members who love theater. A short time ago, I joined the StageWest board and am continuing my campaign to increase attendance. Last season's "campy" productions of Judy's Scary Little Christmas, a holiday season musical with Judy Garland, Ethel Merman, Liberace, Joan Crawford and more, as well as Johnny Guitar: The Musical adapted from the Joan Crawford film, Johnny Guitar, were great fun! I was also profoundly moved by the performance of Angels in America: Part One. These productions continue a tradition of bringing progressive themes and edgy material to Central Iowa. StageWest is a wonderful part of our community. I hope you will join me in proudly supporting this coming season.

At the next FFBC meeting, I encourage you to corner 5-8 friends and commit to buying season subscriptions. Then decide on a restaurant to begin your evening, select the dates, and make reservations – a series of special nights out together will follow!

I look forward to seeing you at the theater!

—Brad Holland



FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views*

Des Moines, Iowa

SEPTEMBER 2006

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From the Editor

The Influence of Great Art

It was an ignominious end to a life of nearly eight decades. She lay crippled in her bed in the ward of an old people's home in the suburbs. She shared a room with two other elderly women, each as destitute as she. Her world had been reduced to a hospital bed and a bedside table. She had been stripped of nearly all her worldly possessions in order to qualify as an indigent patient. Her only income was her Social Security, and even that went to the home to help with expenses.

She had been living with her second son at his home for a number of years, but after a fall there, she never recovered her ability to walk. She was, however, alert and tried daily through physical therapy provided by the care facility to regain her mobility. She never did.

She was a simple woman. She had no formal education beyond her high school diploma earned from a small town school in rural Crawford County. She did, however, hold a wealth of wisdom that she had gained over the years as a wife living with an alcoholic husband and as a mother, raising two sons.

The one thing she was allowed to take with her to the home was a print that had hung on the walls in her various residences during her lifetime. The picture had been purchased sometime in the 1920s from a department store in Cedar Rapids. The print in its round, gold-tinted frame, was of Raphael's Madonna della Seggiola, also known as Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist.

She more than likely had no idea who Raphael was, or that he was a great Renaissance painter who painted this picture during his years in Florence in the early sixteenth century. She didn't know the term "tondo," which means a round work of art, but she appreciated the circular composition of the print. What she did know, however, was that this particular piece of art spoke to her. She really didn't need to know anything else about it. The value of art is not its monetary price but how it affects the individual. And for her, this picture spoke volumes. It was family, religion, hope, color, and composition all rolled into one. In short, it changed her life. Great art, like love, doesn't die. It keeps on giving to generation after generation.

Nearly a decade after her death, the woman's second son visited the Piti Palace in Florence and came across Raphael's original painting in one of the rooms of the palace which now is an art museum. The original, even more than the print with which he had been familiar all his life, moved him to tears. It still speaks.

—Steve Person