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First Friday News & Views

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AFRICA: An Assault on the Senses

by Jonathan Wilson

On a trip to Botswana for a photographic safari, it started with an assault on common sense. Before boarding any flight, I was subjected to multiple levels of electronic and personal scrutiny. Shoes off, pockets empty, watch and belt-buckle in the tray, and proof of identity provided repeatedly. God help us if anything metal would make it onto the plane. I had confiscated by airline security personnel one partially used small bottle of mouth wash and a partially used little tube of toothpaste. You just can't be too careful. Then, on the trans-Atlantic flights, I was graciously served FOUR delicious meals with metal flatware, including serrated-edged knives. My fellow passengers were protected from my Scope and Crest, but with bad breath, I could have slit all their throats and commandeered the plane thanks to accommodations from flight attendants.

Things improved from there. Upon arrival at a tented camp, I was immersed in unfamiliar sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and touch. Sights of wild animals in their element, up close and personal. An elephant less than 100 feet from where I was eating lunch. A lion and lioness close enough to touch, with no bars between us. Sounds of hippopotamus, hyena, lion, and leopard right outside the tent as I struggled to find sleep. Tracks in the morning proved visitors in the night. Tastes of local foods fittingly Americanized. Smells of elephant droppings tinged with the pungent aroma of sage and, occasionally, sweet flowers. The touch of dry grass as I crawled on hands and knees to get closer to a herd of cape buffalo, making sure that the camera hanging from my neck didn't drag in buffalo pies along the way.

I learned that your sight improves with the wind in your face. That is to say, if the game can't smell you, you have a better chance of seeing and filming the animals.

I also came away with a sense that anyone who wants to do so should be allowed to go to Africa and kill any animal they want, *armed only with a six inch knife*. Maybe one of those handed out on the plane getting there. Fair's fair. I'd hope those who still go to Africa armed with guns instead of cameras can be first in line.

Oh, and the trip ended as it began, with an assault on common sense. On the way back they confiscated and destroyed as "unauthorized food items," some partially digested palm tree seeds, pre-fertilized with a coating of elephant dung, that I'd squirreled away in my luggage in the hope of starting a palm tree. As far as I am concerned, they were *authorized* to eat them.

—Jonathan Wilson

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CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, November 3 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Our guest speaker will be Althea Holcomb, CEO of Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Central Iowa.

▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, October 31 to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com or 288-2500 by phone.

Martha Willits and the “People for Project Destiny” Campaign

by Bruce Carr



Guest speaker at our October meeting was Martha Willits, a long-time friend and ally of our community, both personally and professionally. A native of Eagle Grove who raised her family in Des Moines, Martha has always been vitally involved here, working as a teacher in the Des Moines Public Schools, serving

for a dozen years as an elected member of the Polk County Board of Supervisors, and heading the United Way of Central Iowa from 1996 to 2004.

As President and CEO of the Greater Des Moines Partnership since 2004, Martha Willits is responsible for operational oversight of the Partnership’s \$7 million annual budget. The Partnership supports economic development programs to enhance metropolitan area growth, member business development and networking, government policy, and legislative strategies at local, state, and federal levels, as well as program support for the seventeen affiliated chambers of commerce. She is also responsible for maintaining strategic alliances with business, education, and government throughout the community.

Martha Willits’s presentation on October 6 was devoted entirely to urging support for the new “People for Project Destiny” campaign. Its aim is to achieve passage of a one-cent increase in the sales tax in Polk, Warren, and Dallas counties. The revenue anticipated from a successful project comes close to \$80 million, of which almost one-third will be mandated to replace revenue “lost” from lowered property taxes. Another third will provide additional tax-relief in the three counties, and the final third will go to improving regional parks, trails, and visitor attractions. Who knew that Iowa is already first or second in the nation in per-capita recreational trails, needing only this boost to make it just as attractive to professional leaders as any other state? Mountains and ocean fronts are so Last Year!

Willits’s advocacy and leadership in central Iowa have earned her the YWCA’s “Woman of the Year” award, Leadership Iowa Alumni Award, the A. Arthur Davis Leadership Award, and the Drake Medal of Service.

—Bruce Carr

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com no later than Tuesday, October 31 for the November 3 meeting. Our speaker will be Althea Holcomb, CEO, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Central Iowa. Jonathan can also be reached by phone at 288-2500.



Thanks to Allen Vander Linden for hosting the October meeting in Jonathan’s absence.



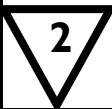
Thanks to Rick Davis for introducing the October speaker, Martha Willits, of the Greater Des Moines Partnership.



FFBC member and pianist Nicholas Roth will perform two Drake University Faculty Concerts on November 13 and 27. The November 13 concert will be with cellist Ashley Sidon, and the November 27 concert will feature Nicholas as piano soloist. Both concerts are scheduled at Sheslow Auditorium on the Drake campus at 8 p.m.



The next PROS party will be held November 11 from 7:00-10:00 p.m. at the home of Michael Thompson and Allen Vander Linden, 7500 Benton Drive, Urbandale. Come prepared to celebrate a sweeping victory by pro-LGBT candidates in the elections that week. Since it’s also Veterans’ Day, feel free to dress as your favorite man in uniform! RSVP by November 5 to dennyschrock@msn.com or by phone at 515-986-3966.



Unbelievable

by Drew Gulley

For the past year teaching abroad in China, I was not out to any Chinese person. As one who has lived openly for many years, this was a bizarre rewind back into the years of the closet. The cultural barriers, the expectations for men, and the expectations for a male foreigner were insurmountable obstacles to openness. Of the top five questions asked of a *laowei*, “Do you have a girlfriend?” lands at number three. My answer was always “no.” I demurred from answering directly when the obligatory “weishenme?” followed. “I have to go back to school. I am too young. I want to focus on my job. Girls are too crazy.”

King, my trainer at the gym, was no different. And, because I interacted with him more than any other Chinese person, his queries became quite pointed. He questioned me on “one night fun,” my dancing in Jiefangbei, and my dating track record back in America. As King was the closest thing to a Chinese friend I had, I felt poignantly awful that I was not open with him. I didn’t want the gym environment to turn weird. I wanted him to feel comfortable around me, and if I came out, I could be asked (indirectly, of course) not to come anymore. With only a five days left in Chongqing, I decided to go for it and come bounding out of the closet to King. I selected Monday, because he was off on Tuesday, and I’d see him on Wednesday (the day I left China) to ascertain his reaction.

After my treadmill run, lifting a bit, and showering, I approached King by the front desk counter.

“King, do you know what a secret is?”

“Hmmm, maybe no. What is ‘secret?’”

“You are the only one to know.”

“Oh, oh! I know ‘secret.’ It is because we are good friends. You tell me secret!”

“Yes! You are my *hao pengyou*, and the only Chinese person who knows this thing. You know how many times you

ask me if I have a girlfriend, or if I have one-night fun with girls?”

“Oh, yes, yes!”

“And I always say, ‘no.’ Right?”

“Yes, yes.”

“King, that is because I do not like girls. I like men. *Wo xihuan nan ren.*”

King pulls a quizzical look. He looks around for a second. Then he looks back at me, and breaks into a huge grin.

“UNBELIEVABLE!!” he screams.

“No, King. It is very believable. My family knows. All of my American friends know. And now, you are the only Chinese person who knows this thing about me.”

“UNBELIEVABLE!” again.

I started laughing.

“Maybe,” King says. “Maybe in China, is not ok.”

“This is true, King. But I hope that maybe someday it will be ok in China.”

“Oh, yes, yes. We are *hao pengyou!*”

“I’ll see you Wednesday, King. *Zaijian.*”

“*Zaijian*, bye-bye.”

And, unexpectedly, he gives me a big hug.

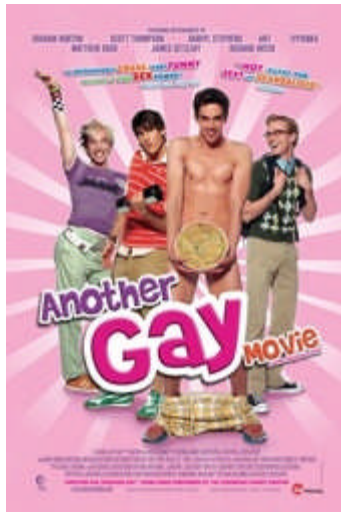
On Wednesday, King met me with a grin on his face. He presented me with a little present, a cell-phone bob to put on a future phone. The bob was a small metal figurine of one of the ‘Friendlies,’ the mascots for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. When I looked at which one of the five he had presented to me, it took every ounce of reserve to avoid rolling on the floor in giggles. He gave me *Huan Huan*. The one with the head of flaming hair.

—Drew Gulley

(Spent the 2005-2006 year teaching English in Chongqing, China and is now an LGBT Fellow at Hofstra School of Law)

Another Gay Movie

Starring Michael Carbonaro, Jonah Blechman, Jonathan Chase II, Mitch Morris, Scott Thompson, Ashlie Atkinson, Darryl Stephens, Matthew Rush, Graham Norton II, John Epperson, Stephanie McVay, Mink Stole, and Richard Hatch III



Directed by Todd Stephens

1 Hr 30 Min

Another Gay Movie is making the rounds in the art houses. The movie is a gay version of the teen coming-of-age film with a bit of **American Pie** and **Carrie** thrown in for good measure. The plot is about four gay friends who have graduated from high school, yet they are chastised by their dyke friend, Muffler (grossly played by Ashlie Atkinson) for not having yet experienced anal sex. They all vow to have anal sex before Muffler's Labor Day Bash.

There is Nico, the very flamboyant one (played over the top by Jonah Blechman), whose mother appears to be ignorant of the fact that her son is oh-so-gay. There is the gay jock, Jarod, played by Jonathan Chase II, and his best friend, Griff (Mitch Morris), the geeky, brainy one. And finally there is Andy, the everyman person, whose father is, like the father in **American Pie**, trying to be with-it and supportive of his son, even when discovering his son's penchant for using Mom's vegetables to break in his posterior area.

It is also a movie where every character except one, Andy's mom, is either gay or bisexual, and that character is a man in drag (John Epperson). So, a realistic vision of the world this ain't, but if you aren't ashamed and actually enjoy some of the **American Pie**-type humor, you might enjoy this gay version. I have never seen a theatrical movie devoted entirely to its principal characters experiencing anal sex and, to make it more interesting, the film is not rated. The film, to its



(Continued on page 5)

Join FFBC Members to See THE LARAMIE PROJECT

To help support the Valley High School Drama Department and support the First Friday Breakfast Club Scholarship Program, you are invited to join other members and friends of FFBC to see The Laramie Project. Tickets for the play will be purchased as a block.

Following the 7:00 Friday, November 3 performance, the group will gather for socializing and discussion. Although the November 3 date is encouraged, tickets through the FFBC block can be purchased for other dates and times of the play, including: November 4 at 2:00 or 7:00 or November 5 at 2:00.

Cost per ticket will be \$15 of which \$8 is for the Valley High School Drama Department and \$7 is for the FFBC Scholarship Fund (a tax deductible donation).

IMPORTANT: Tickets go on sale on Monday, October 23. **Ticket orders can be received only through Sunday, October 29.** To order tickets email or telephone Byron Huff, Chair of the FFBC Scholarship Fundraising, at byron.huff@mchsi.com or telephone 288-9519 indicating the number of tickets and which performance you wish to attend. Payment for the tickets can be sent directly to Byron at the address below or paid at the FFBC breakfast meeting on November 3.

Mail checks payable to *First Friday Breakfast Club*.

Byron Huff
2852 Druid Hill Drive
Des Moines, IA 50315-1845

FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views*

Des Moines, Iowa

NOVEMBER 2006

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From the Editor

A Voice of Reason

A friend of mine involved in the political scene had an extra ticket to the Jefferson/Jackson Day Dinner on October 14 and asked if I would like to go. Normally, I don't attend those kinds of events, but President Clinton was the keynote speaker, so I said yes. I'm glad I did.

Listening to the last legitimately elected President of the United States refreshed my memory of how much his kind of leadership is missed. He stated early on that he wasn't running for any office and that freed him to talk about whatever he wished. And he did. It was so welcoming to listen to a man with compassion, ideas, intellect, and wit—not at all like the dullard the Supreme Court saddled this country with back in 2000. His tone was serious, punctuated with occasional bits of humor. He said, for example, that Democrats wished George W. Bush well for the remainder of his term because we couldn't afford to be stuck with his dour Vice President as chief executive.

Perhaps the two most important elements of his speech concentrated on the upcoming election and the almost grave concern that he experiences when he speaks to audiences around the country about how out of whack our country is these days. He urged Democrats not to allow others to define who they are but for them to frame their agenda with facts, not fear. Bravo!

Other events of the evening included the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus and the introduction of statewide candidates for Governor, Congress, and the Legislature. Senator Tom Harkin, who introduced Clinton, did his usual fine job of rousing the crowd with his stinging barbs at the Bush Administration.

A humorous event of the evening did happen to me. When my friend called about going to the dinner, he said that it was black tie-optional. I told him that I do own a tuxedo but that I thought it a bit over the top for such an occasion. I let him know that I would be appropriately dressed. As a joke, I wore a black tie—also a black shirt, black slacks, black jacket, black socks, and black shoes. Little did I know that was also the dress code for the Gay Men's Chorus! After the speeches were over and I stood talking to my friend, State Senator Dick Dearden and his wife, an elderly woman approached me. She told me how much she enjoyed my singing! We got a good laugh out of that, especially since I have no musical ability whatsoever.

The evening turned out to be a great success for the Iowa Democratic Party, and I thoroughly enjoyed seeing many people I have known over the years when I worked for Christie Vilsack's literacy foundation. Perhaps the most important message of the evening came from Lieutenant Gubernatorial candidate Patty Judge: Vote early and encourage everyone you know to change the direction of this state and this country.

—Steve Person

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