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First Friday News & Views

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INSIDE

Movie Reviews by Gary Kaufman	2
President's Editorial	3
Briefs & Shorts	3
From the Editor	4

CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, November 2 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Our guest speaker will be the Reverend Mark Stringer, the pastor who married Iowa's only legally wedded gay couple.

- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, October 30 to Jonathan.Wilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

Gay 101: The Series Is sexual orientation a choice?

by Jonathan Wilson

After presidential candidate Bill Richardson, a proven ally of the gay community, thoroughly muffed a couple of fairly basic gay-related questions at a public forum, including the one posed above, it occurred to me that there could be some value in a series of brief articles on a variety of such questions. I'll be offering my perspective as succinctly as possible. Readers are welcome to contribute opposing views and additional comments for future publication.



Jonathan Wilson

What Richardson could preferably have said is this: The question is one on which opinions apparently differ. Research continues. Much of the research so far strongly suggests that there is at least some biological predisposition about our orientation. There is an undeniable choice involved, however. Some who are gay, like the Senator Larry Craig's of the world, continue to choose, with considerable psychological harm to themselves, to stay in the closet (except for some occasional toe tapping). They do so out of fear—fear of government-sanctioned discrimination, fear of discrimination by employers, and fear of condemnation and rejection by family and others.

With the “don't ask, don't tell” policy, our government has, I think foolishly in terms of our national security, demanded that gay Americans who want to serve their country honorably in the military, must keep this secret about who they are. Such a policy doesn't keep us safer; it puts us all at risk because it makes those service members vulnerable to blackmail. It could compromise classified information. It's also resulted in discharging talented Arabic linguists when we have been needing them most. It is a flawed policy. It is a failed policy. It needs to be changed for the sake of our national security. The government should not be forcing law-abiding citizens to choose to *act* heterosexual in order to serve, any more than the government should force folks to *act* like they're Christians as a condition of service.

Nature; nurture; choice in some measure more or less? Ultimately the answer doesn't matter. The research and debate over the issue can continue, and a definitive answer may or may not emerge. A definitive answer to that question is not needed in order to answer the important question: are we or are we not going to keep faith with our historic commitment to civil rights and equal treatment for all law-abiding citizens?

Religion is clearly a choice; including the choice to be free from religion. Race is clearly not a choice. We protect the right to equal treatment under the law regardless of those personal characteristics. Being a choice or not doesn't matter in answering the important question.

I learned long ago that if the answer to a question makes no difference, the question itself is meaningless and probably a red herring. The nature / nurture question is a perfect example. ▼

The only thing that can grow without nourishment is an ego.

Two Murder Mysteries:

The Kingdom

Starring Jamie Foxx, Chris Cooper, Jennifer Garner, Jason Bateman, Tom Bresnahan, Ali Suliman



In the Valley of Elah

Starring Tommy Lee Jones, Charlize Theron, Jason Patric, Susan Sarandon, Jonathan Tucker

Review by Gary Kaufman

Two murder mysteries are currently playing the theaters and have the conflict in the Middle East as one of their central themes. Both movies have a strong impact.

In **The Kingdom**, one of the FBI's own has fallen. The agent was killed while investigating a terrorist attack in an American compound in Saudi Arabia where an even larger bomb than the first explodes. The second explosion is aimed at the officials who came to investigate the original attack, and it was enormous.

Jamie Foxx is the head of the investigating team of FBI agents who have to fight governmental red tape of a State Department that would just like the whole thing to blow over, figuratively speaking, so as not to rile our Saudi allies. The State Department feels that sending in FBI agents to investigate the incident would be a "reckless risk" because the Saudi royal family would prefer to keep the investigation under wraps.

It is up to Jamie Foxx to out maneuver these obstacles to get to the site and find out who staged the attacks. He finds an ally in the Saudi military ranks who wants to find the real killers as well. The two of them and the rest of the FBI team then participate in a harrowing journey to find the killers. Toward the end of the film it becomes an intense action movie involving chases and shoot outs until the final showdown occurs. The film ends on the somber note that both the Americans and the terrorists agree on a mutually felt goal, "We are going to kill them all!"

In the Valley of Elah begins with retired

Sergeant Deerfield (Tommy Lee Jones) and his wife (Susan Sarandon) being told that their son is AWOL after returning from Iraq. Sergeant Deerfield is sure his son would never be AWOL unless something was terribly wrong. He begins finding out who his son hung out with, places where he went near the base, and how he spent his time. Soon the horrid discovery is made that Deerfield's son had been murdered on an isolated hilltop, decapitated and cut into pieces and burned, and the remains scattered over a large area from animals feeding on the charred remains. The remains were found on military property, so the military does its best to cover it up. Deerfield convinces Detective Emily Sanders (Charlize Theron), to investigate the case based on the fact the murder itself occurred on city property.

This is not an action movie. In fact, sometimes it is painstakingly slow. But this helps illustrate the perseverance of the father in determining what actually happened to his son. The movie is also shot in very drab, washed out color, as if every color were a variation of Army kaki. The film has a tension and emotional intensity to make up for its lack of color and action. The film also deals with what happens to our soldiers who get sent to Iraq and have to deal with the standard operational procedures of running over innocents for fear they might be part of an attack, and how that affects their psyche. Sergeant Deerfield learns more about his son than perhaps he wanted to know. If people are sent out and learn to kill and inflict torture, can they turn it off when they return to civilian life? **In the Valley of Elah** questions that ability. The normally patriotic Sergeant Deerfield ends the film with an emotional act that illustrates his belief that America is in distress. The film in its ending credits cites various resources for veterans who experience combat stress. **In the Valley of Elah** is an extremely disturbing film. The horror of the United States involvement in the Iraq war is much more pervasive than merely the body count. It should also include the damage to the human spirit of those sent to participate. ▼

It took Congress over 90 years to flirt with declaring as genocide the slaughter of Armenians in Turkey. At that rate, the situation in Darfur should get addressed around the year 2100.

(Continued from page 3)

be more discerning. Folks in pursuit of their *faux* self-interest, who vote against more money for schools "because they don't have kids in school," participate in a terrible mistake. And its been going on in this country for too long. In the perennial competition between guns and butter, guns are winning, and we are losing.

On the bright side—and in all things we should search for that—the nurse and receptionist didn't finish their day without some valuable education that may avoid a catastrophe in the future, and on top of it all I got a free flu shot. ▼



Above All, Fund Education

by Jonathan Wilson

So I walked into my doctor's office to get the second in a series of three shots to inoculate for Hepatitis B. I gave my name to the nice woman at the reception desk and told her I didn't need to see the doctor; I had an appointment with his nurse. She said, "Oh, you must be here for a flu shot *or something.*" Not wanting to discuss confidential matters in the earshot of others in the waiting room, I said, "Yes." She then said she was new to her job and to give her a moment to find my appointment on her computer. Momentarily, she brightened, saying she'd found the appointment and I should take a seat with the others and wait to be called.

After only a short wait, my name was called and the nurse ushered me into an examining room, syringe in hand. I dutifully rolled up my left sleeve; she said I got to choose which arm. She proceeded with the injection and started for the door. I asked whether I needed to schedule my final shot with her or with the new receptionist. She informed me, with a tone that suggested I might not be too bright or was perhaps a touch senile, that there is no additional shot required for the flu. With a tone that suggested that she had just screwed up royally and given the wrong shot to someone who sues people for a living, I said that was all well and good, but I had not come in for a flu shot, let alone two. "I came for a hep-B shot. Did you just now give me a flu shot?"

With the look of someone who has just witnessed the digging of her own grave, she said that she had done exactly that, and then excused herself, promising to be right back. Back instead came the office manager, full of apologies needless to say, as well as assurances that the flu shot would do no harm, she said I would be promptly given the shot I was supposed to receive, and the nurse and receptionist would both be "written up for this unfortunate incident."

A lesson I learned long ago had been reinforced. When receiving medical care it is important to remain eternally vigilant, to ask questions, and to make sure you and the care provider both understand and agree about the course of contemplated treatment. The corollary is that if ever you are incapacitated or actually are a touch senile, you need a vigilant advocate with you. If you don't, they'll kill you for sure.

And there was a larger lesson about the critical importance of education. There was nothing unintelligent about either of those responsible for the royal screw up that could have had disastrous consequences. They simply lacked proper training. They hadn't received sufficient education in the checks and cross-checks necessary to deliver medical treatment safely.

And that, in turn, prompted me to think again about the importance of quality, public education in general. When public education is under-valued and under-funded, as it can be and has been so easily without apparent consequences, there are consequences nevertheless in the quality of life for all of us. When we find ourselves dealing with an inept government bureaucrat; a fast food employee who needs pictures to operate a cash register; a slow driver insisting on staying in the fast lane; an incompetent car mechanic or, worse, airplane mechanic; or

anyone for that matter, smart enough but lacking a good education to do their job properly, we pay a price. We pay a price in frustration. We pay a price in compromised medical care and shoddy services. We pay a price in less successful international competition. We sow the very seeds that will destroy our democracy, because the more easily manipulated, under-educated citizen has an equal vote with those who have been educated to

(Continued on page 2)

People are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, all of which they must continually fight for.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the November 2 meeting no later than October 30 to Jonathan.Wilson@davisbrownlaw.com. He can also be reached by phone at 288-2500. Our speaker will be the Reverend Mark Stringer, the pastor who married Iowa's only legally wedded gay couple.



Twin Cities' One Voice Mixed Chorus with the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus joined by members of Plymouth's Chancel Choir together in concert!

Friday, November 9, 7:30 PM, Plymouth United Church of Christ, 4126 Ingersoll Avenue, Des Moines. Tickets \$20* adults, \$10* children 12 & under. www.dmgmc.org or 515.953.1540. Retail ticket outlet: Liberty Gifts, 333 E Grand, Des Moines.

*All ticket proceeds benefit the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus

For 19 years, One Voice Mixed Chorus (www.ovmc.org) has united gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people, and straight allies in working for social change. One Voice is known for its musical excellence, diverse repertoire, humor, and strong commitment to community outreach. With eighty singing members, One Voice is the largest GLBT mixed chorus in North America and has performed for thousands of people in the Twin Cities, greater Minnesota, and beyond.



Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the FFBC Scholarship Fund. Send your check to Jonathan Wilson, 666 Walnut Street, Suite 2500, Des Moines, IA 50309. Make the check out to FFBC and write "Scholarship" on the memo line.



A reminder to both members and non-members to designate FFBC when filling out your United Way pledge card.



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From the Editor

No Such Thing

According to **The American Heritage College Dictionary**, the word “nonesuch” means a person or thing without equal. In 1538, construction of Nonsuch Palace in Surrey, England, began under orders from Henry VIII. It supposedly was a royal residence of so much splendor that nothing could compare to it. Such claims, it seems to me, are subjective, but we will never really know since Nonsuch was demolished in the late seventeenth century. Likewise, during his recent appearance at Columbia University, Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad claimed, “...we don’t have homosexuals, like in your country.” Another interesting—and subjective—comment, to say the least. These examples led me to another quotation I recently heard while watching an old movie on television. In the opening sequence of **Enchantment**, a soon-to-be-demolished London house narrates to the viewer, “There’s no such thing as an empty room.”

Now that is a nonesuch statement if there ever was one. While the movie, starring David Niven and Evelyn Keyes, was an enjoyable romantic melodrama that traced the lives of various occupants of the house, it was that opening line that stuck with me. If, like me, you ever moved from one residence to another, a glance around a room emptied of its furniture, objects, and pictures still holds precious memories. How many of us have ever said or thought, “If only these walls could talk?” Like Emily Dickinson said, “For my companions I have the hills and the sundown and my dog, Carlo... They’re better than beings, because they *know*, but don’t *tell*.” So it is with denuded rooms. Even new houses and buildings hold the history of those who constructed them—the architects, the carpenters, the plasterers, the painters. They all leave their marks.

One needs to be careful when he says, “There’s no such thing,” because he may not know for sure. Ghosts? Eternal Life? Santa Claus? There *may* be such things. Who knows for sure? I can, however, think of one instance when the phrase applies. In the 1972 comedy **Butterflies Are Free**, Goldie Hawn got it right when she said, “There’s no such thing as a young Republican!” You go, girl!

—Steve Person

Some people become hard of hearing whenever conscience speaks.
