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First Friday News & Views

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Life in the Balance

by Jonathan Wilson

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CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, February 1, 2008 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Our guest speaker will be Neil Giuliano, President of GLAAD.

▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, January 29 to Jonathan Wilson @davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

A few years ago liberal Minnesota Senator Wellstone died unexpectedly in a plane crash. It prompted me at the time to reflect, politically. More recently, I was reading the January issue of the Iowa Bar Association Journal. It honored a couple dozen Iowa attorneys who died during 2007. I was well acquainted with eleven of them. It prompted me to reflect, professionally. A little over a month ago a favorite aunt of mine died, the sister of my mother and my best connection to her from her own generation. It prompted me to reflect, personally.

I've practiced law for over 33 years, and I'm definitely past middle age, unless I'm going to live to more than 124. Not likely. I probably have left, what, maybe 1500 weeks, and weekends. That assumes a life expectancy based optimistically on my genetics, and are long by about 750 weeks and weekends based on the current average life expectancy of men in the United States. No amount of "eating right," drinking less, or exercising more will extend my life span much, if at all. I could die tomorrow. As I see it, the only reason to do any of them is to feel better while I remain alive. Regardless, the corollary of birth is death. It ends with that, for all of us.

"Every death is the end of a life and a message to the living."

If we're paying attention, as we should be, wisdom should grow with the number of times we've been to the cemetery to celebrate the life of a loved one. Every death is the end of a life and a message to the living. Those trips should force us to focus on the finite nature of life.

If we lived in this realm forever, we'd have no motivation to get around to doing anything worthwhile. We'd have no reason to prioritize our activities or to search with any sense of urgency to find meaning and to cultivate satisfying relationships with family and friends. There may be those who are successful in taking economic advantage of us and end their lives with more accumulated wealth, but their end is equally inevitable. Rich or poor, life is terminal.

A recent comment in **The Des Moines Register's** "2¢ Worth" got it half right: "I am 98, and all I can say is enjoy yourself, it's later than you think." We should be enjoying ourselves in life, certainly. Death could easily interrupt our plans to postpone enjoyment of life until we hit 98.

But, while any of us could die tomorrow, on any given day the odds for most of us are that we won't. If we live exclusively and entirely as if life were going to end for us tomorrow, and concentrate on enjoyment exclusively, what do we do when we wake up the day after tomorrow? There's the challenge; the call to balance; the perennial, parabolic competition between the philosophy of the grasshopper and that of the ant.

One thing for sure, we should not entrust government, foreign policy, trade policy, fiscal responsibility, social values, environmental stewardship, space exploration, or funding of scientific research to those who myopically profess belief that the world is about to end. Taking

(Continued from page 1)

these grasshoppers at their professed word—by way of two examples—how can we trust them to preserve the environment for our progeny, or trust them to set policy on budget deficits that mortgage a future they don't think will ever come? They cannot be trusted. They lack the critical, rational balance between ordered priorities for the present that recognize our personal, finite existence, on the one hand, and the prospect of future generations, on the other.

We need to strive to achieve that elusive balance in our own lives and insist on it from those who would govern. On the bright side: the good thing about growing older is reduced peer pressure. Keep smiling and stay balanced. ▼

With money you can buy: a clock, but not time.

FFBC Welcomes New Police Chief Judy Bradshaw to the January Meeting

Our first—entertaining and inspiring—guest speaker of the New Year, on January 4, was Des Moines's new Police Chief, Judy A. Bradshaw, who joined the police ranks as a cadet in 1980 and who's risen in the 27 years since then to become the city's first female Lieutenant (1996), first female Captain (1998), first female Major (2003), and—as of July 2007—first female Chief.



FFBC Vice-President Allen Vander Linden and Chief of Police Judy Bradshaw

Bradshaw, who has earned academic degrees from the FBI National Academy and Drake University—including an MA in Public Administration—commands a force of just over 360 sworn officers and about 120 civilians, policing a city of around 200,000. The Des Moines Police Department is organized into five bureaus: the Administrative Services Bureau, the Detective Bureau, the Homeland Security Bureau, the Inspectional Services Bureau, and the Patrol Services Bureau. Each bureau is under the command of a Major, each of whom reports directly to the Chief.

Chief Bradshaw began her talk by referring to the just-completed Iowa Caucuses and their impact on Des Moines (the last remaining personnel were not due to leave Des Moines Airport, she noted, until early that afternoon). “We take the caucuses very, very seriously, from the public safety standpoint,” she said. While making sure that officers don't “over-police” demonstrators who are exercising their First Amendment rights, she also

has ultimate responsibility for the safety of candidates and other dignitaries who are in Des Moines for the caucuses. The extra cost to the Department she estimated at about \$80,000—some of which she's able to cover with Homeland Security money authorized by the President and Congress in the wake of 9/11.

Bradshaw then went on to a quick and efficient outline of her four top issues as Police Chief: domestic abuse, ethnic outreach, gay and lesbian interface, and community policing. She's established a new section to track potential domestic violence before it becomes criminal and is now pairing detectives with social workers. The detectives grumble at that, she remarked, but they'll accept it. She praised three officers—two Latino, one Asian—who are specifically targeted toward earning the trust of Des Moines's growing ethnic communities and reducing crime. She spoke of a new openness to the Des Moines gay community and noted in particular the one out younger officer on the force (a lesbian) for whom she has great expectations. Noting that 80 percent of her officers are under 35 (“I'm *not* in that group,” she admitted), she emphasized the importance of succession planning: younger officers must be quickly and importantly involved and must be urged to understand that staying in the closet is no longer necessary in order to rise in the department. She touted the demonstrated effectiveness of neighborhood policing in reducing neighborhood violence, keeping Des Moines crime rates far lower than those in such comparable cities as Omaha and Minneapolis.

In a moving conclusion to her speech, Bradshaw thanked our community and friends for the telephone calls and buttonholing that saved her candidacy, when a last-minute shift in the process seemed about to derail her expected appointment. “I never knew how much influence the citizenry can have on the officials,” she said, “and I'm very grateful.”

—Bruce Carr

Oxymoronically speaking: Military intelligence. God of justice and mercy. Political leaders. Water landing.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

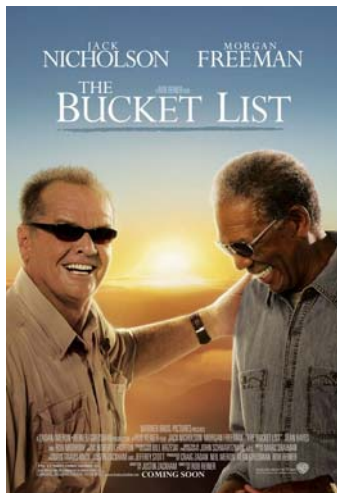
Be sure to RSVP for the February 1 meeting no later than January 29 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com. He can also be reached by phone at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Neil Giuliano, President of GLAAD.

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Thanks to Allen Vander Linden for his introduction of our January speaker, Des Moines Police Chief Judy Bradshaw.

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Archived issues of the FFBC newsletter are available on our web site: www.ffbcowa.org.

The Bucket List

Directed by Rob Reiner
Review by Gary Kaufman



In *The Bucket List*, Edward Cole (Jack Nicholson) is a multi-millionaire caught in his own rule of his profit-making privatized hospitals: “Two beds to a room—No exceptions!” When he suddenly is discovered to have a brain tumor which requires an operation and chemotherapy, Edward ends up having to share his room with Carter Chambers (Morgan Freeman), a black mechanic who had dreamed of teaching history. Unfortunately, his dreams were shattered when he was a teenager, and his girlfriend became pregnant. He was forced to take the first decent-paying job that came along. Edward is a brilliant man caught in unfortunate circumstances. He, too, is undergoing chemotherapy.

But the Fates are not good to either man, as they both find out that they have only 6 months to a year to live. Edward then finds a slip of paper that Carter called the “Bucket List.” When Carter had been in college, his philosophy instructor had his students fill out a list of things they wanted to do before they kicked the bucket. He thought he would make another list. But Edward wants to take it one step further; he wants the two of them to put together a list and then actually do it. “Do you want to go out having a progression of relatives each feeling sorry for you as they are watching you die with you spending your time trying to cheer them up? Or do you want to go out with some balls?!” asked Edward. Edward has the money to make the dreams actually happen, and Carter agrees to go. Thus, they go on adventure after adventure: skydiving, the Pyramids, The Great Wall, driving race cars—a wide variety of thrills, sites, and pleasures.

Some TV stars have nice roles in this movie. Sean Hayes, whom most people know for playing the role of Jack on *Will and Grace*, plays a delightfully dedicated assistant to Edward with a high degree of wit. Rob Morrow, who played Dr. Joel Fleishman in *Northern Exposure*, continues playing the doctor, only here he is the specialist hired by Edward to be a straight shooter and tell them the truth on how long they have to live.

The movie really belongs to Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman whose adventures are not only invigorating, but include their discussions on the meaning of life, religion, and little known bits of trivia. Through their adventures Edward learns to enjoy what life he has left, and they both reignite their

feelings toward their families. It has a heartfelt and teary-eyed ending, so be sure to bring along some tissues. But it is also a satisfying ending, unlike many of the current bank of Oscar-contending movies that just pull the plug and really have no endings or make you leave the theater feeling very depressed. This is a movie that will, perhaps, make you appreciate life a little more. And that is not a bad way to leave a movie theater. Enjoy. ▼



FFBC FUNDRAISER



Please don't forget to participate in our efforts to raise money for the FFBC scholarship program. It is, without question, the most popular thing we do as a group. It recognizes Iowa high school students who have distinguished themselves by activities designed to reduce homophobia in their schools and communities. It gives our members a “ticket” to high school graduations all across the state to make the scholarship presentations; and that, in turn, introduces well-adjusted, unapologetic gay men to audiences of folks who think they've never before seen a gay person in real life. It brings the young people and their families together at a wonderful, supportive breakfast meeting every June. It has earned FFBC the distinction of being picketed by the infamous “Rev.” Fred Phelps, and that enabled us to raise money with our “Phelps Helps Fundraiser.”

Our speaker at the meeting February 1 will be Neil Guiliano, President of Gay Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). He will also be attending the Red Party reception that evening. Both events are planned for Hoyt Sherman Place, and you won't want to miss out on either of them.

It's reasonable to think that this ten year scholarship program played an important role in the legislative successes we witnessed in Iowa during 2007. We saw adoption of legislation outlawing bullying in schools, including expressly actual or perceived sexual orientation. We also saw the expansion of the Iowa Civil Rights Law to include sexual orientation as well as gender identity.

Our work is not done; homophobic bigots have not yet been fully marginalized. The scholarship program helps in that effort, and you can help in raising money for the scholarships. You can help by contributing money, obviously. You can ask others to give money too. You can also help by volunteering to assist with the Red Party reception. If you can assist, please contact Rick Miller (erik2000dsm@aol.com or 274-5518). ▼

In Afghanistan, it's one thing not to be able to find Bin Laden, who is obviously mobile and secretive. But how to explain poppy fields that are huge, stationary, and colorful. Opium production has hit record highs since the Allied invasion.



Ask yourself: where do these little countries, insurgents, and rebels get all their guns and ammo?

FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views*

Des Moines, Iowa

FEBRUARY 2008

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From the Editor

*Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our in firm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise*

*As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind—*

Emily Dickinson

If there were some way to meet a person from the nineteenth century, I believe I would want to become acquainted with Emily Dickinson. She most certainly was a strange soul, but she knew better than any poet or philosopher I've ever read how to cut to the heart of a matter with an economy of words. For a person who never strayed far from her native Amherst, Massachusetts, she knew the world better than any international traveler.

A contemporary of hers, Mark Twain, traveled the world extensively and spoke and wrote of his exploits with humor and insight. While Twain could weave a tale with relish, Dickinson could touch a heart or point out a *Truth* with just a few well-chosen phrases. Both were gifted writers, and both are still read widely today—unfortunately, not widely enough. It would be good if they were to be included in the state-wide standards the Iowa Legislature and Governor Culver are proposing for our public schools. They won't be included, of course. *Truth*, slanted or otherwise, is too much for some people to handle.

Dickinson could also appreciate humor, both in herself and in her relationships. She once said, "My earliest friend wrote me the week before he died, 'If I live, I will go to Amherst; if I die, I certainly will!'" I like that one.

If, on one of these cold winter nights, you find the television shows too awful to watch, the movie selections at the local cinemas not to your liking, or the companionship of others just too much to take, check out a copy of Emily Dickinson's poems from your local library and read her *Truth*. I believe you won't be disappointed.

—Steve Person

In a plane crash, if you didn't fasten your seat belt low and tight across your lap, but instead you slouched and tightened it across your mid-section, you could die a paraplegic rather than just dying.

Better to fly with a pilot who's had several close calls than one who has experience only with perfect flying conditions.
