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OF SLOBS, THE IGNORANT, AND THE INANE

by Jonathan Wilson

We share the world with all sorts of people. Some are just plain slobs. You know the type. The ones who throw cigarettes out of the car window after smoking with kids in the car. The ones who don't flush a public toilet or who leave pieces of toilet paper on the floor behind them. The ones who leave debris behind after a picnic in a public park. The ones who change their minds about something at the grocery store and put it back on any shelf.

Some are out right illiterate, walking testimonials to the failure of our public education system. They don't read and, as a result, have substantially lost the ability to read anything more challenging than a third-grade level of comprehension. They can't speak with clarity or proper grammar. I've heard plenty of them -- college "students" -- interviewed in their football uniforms and destined to make millions of dollars in the pros. Too often, in their heart-of-hearts, these folks know some of these limitations and, as a consequence, tend to over-compensate with bravado or with abuse of what little power or authority they may have over others. We've all encountered them in the workplace with too much frequency. They give even the Peter Principle a bad name.

Some are ignorant despite their literacy. They cling to stereotypes and preconceived notions on a host of topics even though contrary information is readily accessible. Their motto is, "Don't confuse me with the facts; I've made up my mind." Gay people have been the particular target of bigotry and prejudice at the hands of this group. So was Columbus.

Some are boorishly rude; they drive slowly in the "fast lane;" they park so as to take up two spaces; they cut in line; and they bemoan "political correctness" because they are too insensitive and lazy to keep up with what may offend those who are culturally different from themselves.

Some are singularly selfish -- the ultra-conservative capitalists among us, particularly, who have not yet had to face, for example, capricious health challenges that can drive almost all but the ultra-rich or the very well-insured into bankruptcy, an early grave, or both. Medical expenses account for more bankruptcies than any other cause. This group couldn't care less; it hasn't happened to them -- yet.

Some folks . . . well, let's be kind . . . are not terribly discerning. For lack of a better word, inane. At the end, George W. Bush still had favorable ratings from something like 30% of eligible voters. Now that's an historically low *percentage*, obviously, but numerically it still represents something like 45 *million* of our fellow citizens who thought the guy was doing a fine job. Is it any surprise that it's possible to find plenty of folks from that group to kick up a ruckus at town hall meetings about health care reform? It doesn't surprise me.

It has always been thus, and always will be. So, what's to be done about it?

First, it's important to take a couple of deep breaths when any of these folks are encountered.

Second, it's important to remind our friends to do the same when they would otherwise have a hissy-fit and compromise their blood pressure and digestive system.

And third, it's important to follow as best we can the Biblical admonition to be innocent as a dove and cunning as a serpent. We really can out-think these folks. We can out-organize them. We can put forth more energy and demonstrate more tenacity than they are willing to do. This is

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CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, February 5, 2010 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Join Patrick McAlvey, survivor of so-called "reparative therapy".

▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday February 2 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

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the burden of enlightenment and civilization in every generation. Everyone is born ignorant and selfish, and the newly minted ignorant and selfish are arriving daily. Progress is measured in small increments and over long periods of time. Flat earth adherents are finally marginalized completely and nearing extinction. You'd be hard pressed now to find anyone willing to fight another civil war to preserve slavery. Those who believe that men are inherently superior to women are becoming more and more marginalized, at least in the developed world. Can heterosexism be far behind? It's a joy to behold.

On this the Bible is also right. The Truth -- over time -- will set us free.

MapQuest should start directions on #5; I know how to get out of my neighborhood.

Speaker for January: Warren Blumenfeld

By Roger Jacobson

Our January 8 speaker, Dr. Warren J. Blumenfeld, is Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Iowa State University. He specializes in Multicultural and International Studies; and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies. Dr. Blumenfeld's comments came from his book **Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price**.

Dr. Blumenfeld spoke of how we as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexed, and Questioning (LGBTIQ) persons, as well as straight people, lose when people are locked into rigid gender-based rules that inhibit creativity and self-expression. Homophobia also inhibits both gay and straight people's ability to form close, intimate non-romantic relationships with members of their own sex. Homophobia also prevents LGBTIQ persons from developing an authentic self-identity and adds to the pressure for lesbian or gay persons to marry an opposite-gender partner which can have disastrous results for both the gay and straight spouses.

Young people, in order to avoid suspicions of being gay or lesbian, are often pressured to become heterosexually active to prove that they are "normal." The consequences for any youth can be emotional trauma, disease, and /or pregnancy.

Heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia inhibit discussion about the lives, sexuality, contributions and insights that are made by the LGBTIQ population. They also inhibit effective government and societal responses to disease and social problems.

Homophobia is also used to stigmatize and silence

LGBTIQ people and, on occasion, target straight people who are perceived to be other than heterosexual. It is also used to divert attention and energy from more important issues.

In a sense, Dr. Blumenfeld spoke to us about things we have all experienced and that we all know. It is good to be reminded of why it is important to carry on our struggle for the benefit of not only our community, but also for the benefit of the world's evermore complex and diverse population.

FFBC Red Party

Save the date!! February 5, 2010

An evening of fun, music, and wine in the spirit of Valentine's Day! Benefiting the First Friday Breakfast Club scholarship fund.

Special Guest: Patrick McAlvey, a "reparative therapy" survivor.

Also, participate in a silent auction and enjoy a "Best Dressed in Red" contest.

Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th and Woodland, Des Moines, Iowa

6p.m. to 9 p.m.

A minimum donation of \$50 will be requested at the door for all donors not responding earlier.

How many times should you say, "What?" before you just nod and smile because you still didn't hear what they said?

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the February 5 meeting no later than February 2. E-mail JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Patrick McAlvey, a survivor of so-called "reparative therapy."



Thanks to Roger Jacobson for his introduction of our February speaker, Warren J. Blumenfeld.



At the Annual Meeting of Members of The First Friday Breakfast Club, Byron Huff, Rick Miller, Ryan Weidner, and Chris Griffin were elected to the Board of Directors. Congratulations!



The Princess and the Frog

Review by
Gary Kaufman

The Walt Disney Animated Studios created **The Princess and the Frog** with the skill and artistry of the greatest of the Walt Disney classics -- with detailed lush backgrounds, great individual characterizations, and an ability to make us laugh and also shed a tear. The film is painted with a vivid color pallet to bring out the characterization of its setting in New Orleans and the bayous. Doctor John sings of New Orleans in the opening song, telling us about how it is a place where the sugar and cotton barons are king. Randy Newman has collected probably the best set of songs he has ever put together for a film, capitalizing on his ability to capture a Cajun southern sound. Each song develops the plot of the story and is combined with an animated visual brilliance that is just jaw-dropping at times.

The central character of the film is Tiana, a hard-working waitress in New Orleans who is saving every penny for the down payment on her dream, a restaurant in an old sugar mill down by the river. As a child she would help her daddy make gumbo and as her daddy said, "Something this good just has to be shared," as he invited the neighbors to join in the feast. As her daddy noted, "Good food brings people together from all walks of life." They dream of having a restaurant together where the finest of New Orleans would come to eat, a place called "Tiana's Place." Tiana grew up with Eudora, daughter of "Big Daddy" La Bouff, the richest man in all of New Orleans, as her playmate while her momma worked at the mansion. The two playmates would be read the fairy tale, "The Princess and the Frog", and dream of marrying a prince one day. They both wished on a star that their dreams would come true, but when Tiana wished, all that showed up was this frog that scared her. Tiana's daddy told her that, "Wishes just don't come true on their own. You need to help the star along. If you work hard, you can do anything you set your mind to." As Dr. John told us in the opening song, "In the Southland, there's a city way down by the river, where the women are pretty, and the men deliver. . . . Rich people, poor people, all got dreams. Dreams do come true in New Orleans." The film makes no bones about showing the disparity between the living conditions of the rich and the poor, but rather than viewing it as disparity it is thought of as diversity.

It is the musical numbers that are really outstanding in this film. Not only is each Randy Newman song a show stopper, but also each is paired with animation with wildly varying styles. When Tiana proclaims that in saving money for her

dream "She's Almost There," it uses the style of Art Deco poster art of the 20s and 30s. When the Shadow Man, Dr. Facilier, lures visiting Prince Navine into his Voodoo Emporium singing about his "Friends on the Other Side", it becomes a psychedelic excursion that makes "Pink Elephant's On Parade" in **Dumbo** look mild in comparison. There are scary demons, an alligator that just wants to play jazz, a Cajun firefly in love with a star, three bumbling frog hunters that remind you of Larry, Darrel, and Darrel of Bob Newhart fame, and Mama Odie, a swamp witch whose powers are called upon to save the day. It is an incredible adventure for children and adults, peppered with quality slapstick humor and one-liners that will probably get past the kids but will be appreciated by the adults. Each musical number is so overdone that Busby Berkley would be proud! Although it illustrates that if you work hard that you can get ahead; it also shows that the most important things in life are relationships, not money. Not a bad moral for the adults or the kids. I have seen one reviewer claim this movie is the best of the year. I don't usually put together such lists, but it very well could be. However, I will put this list together:

BEST MOVIE NOT REVIEWED IN 2009: This movie was in town for only a week or two, not long enough to write a review and get it published in time for people to see the film, but Woody Allen's movie, **Whatever Works**, is one of his best in years. Very funny and very intelligent.

BIGGEST DISSAPPOINTMENT IN 2009: There were many, but by far the biggest was **Nine**, a movie that is somehow nominated for many Golden Globe awards. I went into this movie expecting **Moulin Rouge** and instead got a musical based on a vastly overrated Federico Fellini movie, **8 ½** (if you want Fellini, I recommend **Satyricon** or **Nights of Cabiria** - from which they made **Sweet Charity**). This movie is the most boring of all movie genre's - a writer with writer's block. I sometimes wonder if these movies are only written by writers with writer's block who can't think of anything else to write about. This movie is so incoherent it will drive you insane. There is not a single memorable song. It is a tremendous waste of Hollywood talent (Judi Dench and Nicole Kidman). I almost wanted to slit my throat to end the agony of sitting through this movie! Avoid at all costs! You have been warned!

If a relationship has to be secret, you shouldn't be in it.

FFBC

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My M. O. (Monthly Observations)

Some Thoughts Regarding the New Year

I would like to give a big THANK YOU to Chris Griffin for taking over and organizing the FFBC Book Exchange. The exchange is one of the great benefits at each monthly meeting. Chris is always looking for books to add to the exchange, so please consider sharing your favorite books so others may enjoy them, too. All titles are welcome. Take a book home next time around and improve your mind. As Chris said at the January meeting, "Even if you read only a few pages, you at least know more than you did before."

Speaking of books, I have a book by an Iowa author that I would like to recommend. It is entitled, **Dewey: The Small Town Library Cat Who Touched the World**. Written by Vicki Myron of the Spencer, Iowa, Public Library, **Dewey** is the story of a kitten that was stuffed into the library's book return chute on a below-zero January night in 1988 and subsequently became a fixture at the library for a generation of readers. The book is a heartwarming story of how the kitten grew into a cat and had a special affinity with hundreds of library patrons over the years. I had the opportunity to meet Dewey in 2003 when I accompanied former Iowa First Lady Christie Vilsack on a visit to the Spencer Public Library. Dewey was pretty old by then, but it was obvious that Dewey ruled the roost. The book is slated to be made into a film with Meryl Streep portraying Vicki Myron. Not bad for a small town librarian and her cat.

As 2009 melded into 2010, I found it fascinating that once again the media hijacked everyone's perception of where we are in the third millennium. When 1999 faded and we went into 2000, the media made such a big fuss about the beginning of the new millennium. Actually, 2000 was the END of the twentieth century, not the beginning of the twenty-first. So now we have all these retrospectives about the so-called first decade of this century when the first decade won't really be over until the end of this year. I wonder if or when they will discover their mistake. Probably never. Their disservice regarding "news" is incredibly narcissistic. I wish American news organizations would take a cue from the BBC and REPORT the news and stop trying to INVENT it. Leave the editorializing to radio talk show hosts and newspapers.

The other interesting observation regarding 2010 is the pronunciation of the number of this year. When it comes to language, Americans are generally notoriously lazy. When we were in 1999, people pronounced it, "Nineteen ninety-nine," not "One thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine." When we went to 2000, people said "Two thousand" because it was easier than "Twenty hundred." All through these last few years, most people referred to the first years as "Two thousand one" etc., up to the end of 2009. I have noticed that many newscasters are now saying, "Twenty ten" rather than "Two thousand ten" in their broadcasts. Anything to cut corners.

If you're looking for an intelligent and well-made movie, I'd suggest **The Young Victoria**. Though some dramatic license has been taken with the script (particularly the 1842 unsuccessful assassination attempt on the Queen's and Prince Albert's lives which shows Albert being wounded when he never was), the script is intelligent, the music inspiring, and the costumes breath-taking. It is cinema as it should be.

Finally, I hope many of you will consider attending the StageWest/Des Moines Playhouse co-production of **Beyond the Rainbow**, staged at the Playhouse on 42nd Street. The show features twenty-five songs relating to Judy Garland and runs through February 21.

Steve Person