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# First Friday News & Views

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## THE POT AND THE KETTLE

by Jonathan Wilson

We hear a lot about “Muslim” terrorists. Some who use that label cite to various passages in the Quran, and there certainly are verses there that would appear to countenance suicidal violence against those who don’t share the faith.

They would also cite the attacks on 9/11/01, by Muslim men, that struck at our *financial* nerve center in the twin towers, our *military* nerve center at the Pentagon, and almost our *political* nerve center in the nation’s capital but for the acts of a courageous gay man and other passengers who crashed their plane in Pennsylvania. All this was achieved at the cost of fewer than 20 suicidal fanatics and less than \$500,000. The attacks succeeded in grounding every non-military airplane in the United States, and sending our president into hiding, as well as throwing our stock market into a nose dive and our economy into a recession.

At the same time it enabled President Bush’s handlers to launch an inexplicable, unwinnable “war” against the tactic of “terrorism,” and probably influenced his re-election thanks to the label of “war president.” It prompted him to say that he would lead a “crusade” in response (that he subsequently refrained from repeating because of some rather unpleasant “Christian” and Muslim history involving crusades -- but tapes and quotes would have continued to help recruiting among our detractors). The guy was a poor student of history and it has doubtless cost American lives. The 9/11 attack started a possibly necessary war in Afghanistan (where war previously contributed to bankrupting the Soviet Union) and an unnecessary one in Iraq. Again, poor mastery of history has cost us dearly in lives, treasure, and moral credibility.

Before we get too full of ourselves, we should consider these words of Jesus: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (This from the so-called Prince of Peace). \* \* \* Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me [personally, I’m unapologetically in that group] is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. *Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*” Matthew 10:34-38 (*emphasis added*). Now that doesn’t come across to me as very convincing advocacy for peace and sounds a lot like a call to suicidal fanaticism.

And consider the somewhat regular phenomenon of admitted civilian slaughter in the course of our military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, conveniently euphemized as mere “collateral damage.” When our foes cause collateral damage, we label it terrorism; when we do it, it’s just an inevitable fact of war -- the “ah shucks” defense for killing innocent men, women, and children; a defense that doesn’t even occur to us when it comes to the 9/11 attacks.

The surviving loved ones of those civilian casualties just might not agree forgivingly with our characterization of our conduct. I don’t know for sure -- maybe those supposedly violence-prone Muslim folks are more loving and forgiving after-all than I

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### CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, June 4, 2010, at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Join Robert Minor and our scholarship recipients.

▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday June 1 to [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or 288-2500 by phone.

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am -- if it were I and the innocent dead included my son, my daughter, or my grandchild (see comment above), I might just develop a bit of a violent streak and be out there looking for some old fashioned revenge. But maybe that's just me.

To put this in context, imagine that for an expenditure of less than half a million dollars and the sacrifice of fewer than 20 lives, we could make a similarly successful hit on the financial, military, and political (almost) nerve centers of Al Qaeda. You know as well as I do that our potbellied generals would be doing cartwheels and handstands in defiance of gravity, and giving each other compliments, high fives, and promotions.

To further put this in context, imagine that our country were being occupied by a foreign military power that was regularly killing our fellow citizens, only some of whom were combatants. What would patriotic Americans be doing? What were they doing during the Revolutionary War? Our first president named George avoided the gallows only because the colonists were successful in driving the British and their mercenaries from our shores. Sound familiar?

It's said that the first casualty of war is the truth. That's got to be true as far as it goes. It's also true that violence begets violence, and in order to keep people willing to sacrifice their sons and daughters (see comment above) our "leaders" must demonize an enemy and tout a false sense of righteousness and a God-is-on-our-side mentality. Given our finite existence there'd be no other way to get by with denying history and waging war. The other side is, not surprisingly, doing exactly the same thing. And the killing continues.

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## Speaker for May: Ryan Roemerma

By Bruce Carr

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Our speaker on the first Friday of May was Ryan Roemerma, executive director of the Iowa Pride Network (IPN), a statewide nonprofit education and advocacy organization which works to make Iowa schools and colleges safe for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Roemerma began with a sincere expression of gratitude to the First Friday Breakfast Club for its key role in the founding of IPN: FFBC provided funding to launch the organization in 2003--when he and co-founder Brad Clark were both still college undergraduates. Seven years later, IPN counts over 120 gay-straight alliances (GSAs) in high schools and colleges

throughout Iowa.

Roemerma gave an efficient and inspiring account of IPN's growth and its activities in fighting bigotry and intolerance against LGBTQA students in Iowa. The Network works directly with students, helping empower them to start and enhance GSAs in their high schools and colleges, while building a statewide network that offers support and mentoring, and educational, advocacy, and networking opportunities. In addition, IPN (you can go to [iowapridenetwork.org](http://iowapridenetwork.org), telephone 515-471-8062) works to educate policy makers and educators on the issues facing LGBTQA students, besides advocating for the interests of these students both locally and statewide.

A very handsome, 30-page result of IPN's activism is its new student organizing handbook, *Making It Real*--copies of which were handed out to all attendees. The booklet outlines in concise but detailed fashion the pertinent Iowa law (both Civil Rights legislation and Safe Schools legislation) and how and when to use its provisions to make Iowa schools safe and nurturing for LGBTQA students.

IPN's student members, using techniques outlined in the manual, have in fact helped to shape Iowa law. They lobbied the state legislature to include sexual orientation and gender identity alongside race, gender, and religion in the 2007 bill to protect school students from harassment. The same year, they joined other groups in a push to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the state's Civil Rights Act. Both laws--among the nation's most inclusive--are now on the books.

In response to questions, Roemerma cited some of the many fellow organizations with whom IPN has worked toward mutual goals, including P-FLAG and The Trevor Project (866-488-7386; [thetrevorproject.org](http://thetrevorproject.org)), which focuses on crisis and suicide prevention efforts among LGBTQA youth. He also noted transgender issues as probably the most significant new concern in the field.

Roemerma further emphasized The Safe School Certification Program, created to survey school climate in the wake of--and encourage compliance with--the new laws. In 2008, IPN convened a diverse group of nonprofit organizations and state agencies, representing many of the 17 enumerated categories within the law, to create a program that provides support to schools and recognition to those that meaningfully implement the law. The Safe School Certification Coalition, as it became known, developed the Safe School Certification Program. The Certification Program helps schools implement the law with fidelity and lead the way in providing a safe and affirming learning environment for ALL students.

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*Bigotry is prideful ignorance; education is our friend -- it attacks bigotry at its core.*

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## Death at a Funeral

Review by  
Gary Kaufman

**Death at a Funeral** opens with the shot of a hearse delivering a coffin to the home of the deceased in which his wife, Cynthia (Loretta Devine), son Aaron (Chris Rock), and Aaron's wife, Michelle (Regina Hall) still reside. The funeral director asks Aaron if he would like to see the body of the deceased; he says "Yes." He discovers that they delivered the wrong body! Thus begins a really long day in Aaron's life as he tries to survive as his entire family comes to his father's funeral. It is a movie that falls somewhat into the genre of the screwball comedies of the 30s in which situations are compounded upon each other until anarchy is achieved. The anarchy becomes totally unleashed when it is discovered that a 4-foot tall, well-dressed, white man in a leather jacket, Frank (Peter Dinklage), was the deceased father's unknown lover, and Frank is demanding \$30,000 because he was cut out of the will, or he will show revealing photos to Aaron's mother.

Then there is the interracial couple, Elaine (Zoe Saldana) and Oscar (James Marsden), who are having trouble getting the approval of their relationship by Elaine's black father, who is the brother of the deceased. To settle the nerves of poor Oscar, Elaine gives him a Valium, but it turns out that it ain't Valium. "It was part mescaline, LSD, and Special K," revealed the pharmacy school member of the family, Jeff (Columbus Short). The medicine bottle gets lost and eventually distributed to others at the gathering; and the calamities accelerate.

Also similar to the screwball comedies of the 30s, the dialog writing is quite spectacular. The film really shows off the comedic talents of Chris Rock, as he conveys the angst that Aaron is experiencing: Although Aaron is the only responsible one of the siblings, everyone loves his brother Ryan (Martin Lawrence) because he is a published writer and Aaron is not.

Other actors put in stellar performances as well. James Marsden is a hoot as Oscar, the incredibly looped boyfriend of Elaine, who was accidentally given the hallucinogenic cocktail. Danny Glover is also very funny as Uncle Russell, the grumpy old relative who doesn't hold back on telling what he thinks. Brian, the friend of the family who got stuck lugging around Uncle Russell, is played by Kevin Hart. He really had the distraught, mentally challenged character down to the point that the character could make that aspect work for him -- such as when he was able to stall the minister from entering the casket room by telling him how Brian had seen the light and had the calling because he had seen "angels, but they were dressed like strippers!"

As things come to a head, Oscar spends a lot of his time being naked on top of the house, the family tries to figure out what to do with Frank, and it all sorts itself out at the end. It is a farcical comedy that is actually funny, and still has a strong, emotional ending. This happens when Aaron sums up who his father was, including the totality of his life that they had all discovered through the course of that incredible day. This combination of farce and emotion is rarely achieved in a movie. As for a summation of the sexuality of the deceased, Uncle Russell says near the end of the movie, after he has seen an accidentally dropped photo of the deceased and Frank in drag at the Broadway premiere of *Dream Girls*, "Always thought he had a little sugar in his tank!" As a characterization, I think I could accept that -- that I have a little sugar in my tank. Be sure to enjoy the sugar, folks!

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*With aging Americans facing an insolvent Social Security System, we need productive and reproductive immigrants.*

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*Sincerity is the key to success, so once you can fake that you should have it made.*

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*New Sharon, Iowa: Named by its founder in honor of his second wife who was also named Sharon.*

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## BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the June 4 meeting no later than June 1. E-mail [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or call him at 288-2500. This is the FFBC Scholarship presentation meeting, and our special guest speaker will be Dr. Robert Minor of the Fairness Project of Kansas City. His books will be on sale at the meeting.



Thanks to Scott Klinefelter for introducing our May speaker, Ryan Roemerman, of the Iowa Pride Network.



Mark your calendar for the July 24 FFBC/PROS party at the home of Allen Vander Linden and Mike Thompson. Details and directions will be distributed closer to the event.



Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome.



Consider making a tax-deductible gift to the FFBC Scholarship Fund.



# FFBC

*First Friday  
News & Views  
Des Moines, Iowa*

*JUNE 2010*

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## My M. O. (Monthly Observations)

### Marriages That Pay

I recently returned from another trip to England. Besides gorging on scones with clotted cream and strawberry jam, fish and chips, and delectable English sausages with mashed potatoes and brown gravy, my favorite thing to do there is to visit country houses that are open to the public.

After last year's visit, I decided upon returning to the United States to join the Royal Oak Foundation, the American branch of Britain's National Trust. The fifty-five dollar membership fee entitles individuals to enter National Trust properties without paying the admission and parking fees. The three National Trust properties I visited on this trip on a three-day outing would have cost more to enter than the membership fee of the foundation. Besides, the Royal Oak Foundation is considered a charity and therefore tax deductible. It was a "marriage" that paid.

The properties visited this year were Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire, Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, and Polesden Lacey in Surrey. The first of those properties, Waddesdon Manor, was a project of Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898). Rothschild's vision was to build a French chateau in the heart of the English countryside, a "marriage" that succeeded brilliantly. Importing in some cases entire rooms from mansions in Paris, the mid-nineteenth century structure resembles a 250-year-old chateau in France. It draws 300,000 visitors each year.

From there our little party of three drove on to Derbyshire to visit Hardwick Hall, a spectacular Elizabethan country house financed by Bess of Hardwick. Bess is a good example of a woman who chose wisely in the marriages to her four husbands. Each succeeding spouse was richer than the last, and by 1590, when the last husband died, Bess had more than enough money to build her dream house. According to the guide book, Hardwick "is relatively plain; what makes Hardwick unforgettable are its height and symmetry, the ever-changing silhouette of its six towers, and the huge expanse of window glass that glitter magically on a sunny evening and inspired the famous rhyme, 'Hardwick Hall, more glass than wall.'" Bess was no slouch when it came to wedded bliss. She knew what she wanted and got it.

While returning to our home base in West Sussex, we motored through Surrey and stopped at Polesden Lacey, the home of Mrs. Ronald Greville. Maggie Greville was the daughter of a millionaire Scottish brewer, and with her marriage to Ronald Greville, she was on the road to becoming a peeress since Ronald was the elder son who would inherit the title of 3rd Lord Greville of Clonyn. Unfortunately for Maggie, Ronald died in 1909, ahead of his father, and the title passed to his brother, leaving Maggie extremely rich but nothing more than a "beeress." She used her money to her advantage, however, and turned Polesden Lacey and her town house on Charles Street in London to watering holes for royalty and aristocracy until her death in 1942. The Duke and Duchess of York (later George VI and Queen Elizabeth) spent part of their honeymoon in 1923 at Polesden Lacey, and George V and Queen Mary were good friends of Maggie.

As real estate is location, location, location, marriage seems to be position, position, position. It certainly doesn't hurt!

- Steve Person