

FFBC First Friday News & Views

Monthly Newsletter of the *First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.*

April 2019

Volume 24

Issue 4

The next FFBC meeting is
Friday, April 5,
2019
7:00 a.m.



FFBC Meeting Location:
Hoyt Sherman Place,
15th & Woodland,
Des Moines



R.S.V.P.

JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com

or phone (515) 288-2500

or the website
by Tuesday,
April 2.



FFBC Website:
www.ffbc-iowa.org



Saving Money Governing Ourselves Transparently

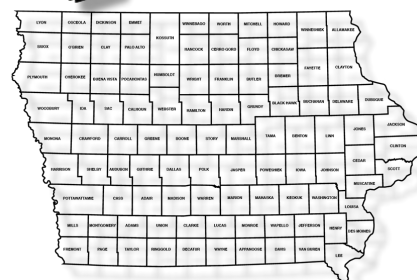
by Jonathan Wilson

The voters in Linn County voted to go from three County Supervisors to five, apparently motivated by a desire for greater rural representation on the Board. More recently, the voters adopted a resolution to return to a three-member Board. By all accounts, the more recent motivation was the desire to save money on county governance. Supervisors are paid a handsome \$103,000 each, so going from five Supervisors to three saves a couple hundred thousand dollars per year -- but at what cost?

The vote to return to a three-member Board of Supervisors does save money, but it violates the law of unintended consequences. The move will join 60 other counties that also have three-member Boards, and will inevitably compromise governmental transparency in Linn County, just as a three-member Board does in those other 60 counties.

The number of Supervisors that a county relies upon for governance does not correlate to the population of the county. Polk County, Iowa's most populous county with 430,640 residents, has a five-member Board of Supervisors. That's a ratio of 86,128 residents for each Supervisor. Adams County, Iowa's least populous county with 4,029 residents, also has a five-member Board of Supervisors. That's a ratio of 805 residents for each Supervisor. The ratio in Polk County has each member of the Board representing more than the entire populations of the twelve least populous counties, combined. Those twelve counties, collectively, are governed by a total of 44 Supervisors -- a ratio of 1,794 residents for each of those 44 Supervisors. That's less than 1/48 of the number of residents represented by every member of the Polk County Board of Supervisors -- which is to say that, in order to achieve an equivalent ratio, the Polk County Board of Supervisors would need more than 240 Board members at a cost of over \$24.5 million.

There is no question among those who have mastered fifth grade math, that numerous Iowa counties are paying too much for governance. The answer, however, is not in doing what Linn County has done -- simply reducing the number of Supervisors and saving \$103,000 +/- apiece for each reduction.



[continued on page two]

Here's why: Iowa has an Open Meetings statute (Iowa Code Chapter 21) that has been around for a long time and was adopted to improve transparency in local government. That law provides that on any occasion when a majority of a governmental body are together and they discuss *any* topic that is or could become an agenda item for that governmental body, it's a public meeting. That means that whenever two members of a three-member Board of Supervisors cross paths at church, a sports event, or the local coffee shop, it's a public meeting if they talk about almost anything besides the weather. It doesn't even have to be one of them who raises an off-limits topic. If they happen to be together with one or more third parties and one of those folks raises the topic, that's also a public meeting.

Here's the deal: public meetings require a prior, published, 24-hour notice in the absence of emergency circumstances. Such notice is to include the meeting agenda, meeting place, and meeting time. After the meeting, minutes are to be written that become a matter of public record, available for public access pursuant to Iowa's Public Records statute. Know this: it's a red flag that the Iowa Open Meetings statute has been violated when there is a *short* public meeting that actually occurs in public. I can guarantee you that the Open Meetings statute is being routinely violated almost daily in every one of the 61 counties having only three members on the Board of Supervisors.

There is a solution hiding in plain sight. Iowa also has Code Chapter 28E. It's a remarkable statute that empowers local governments to enter into an agreement by which "any power or powers, privileges or authority exercised or capable of exercise by [any one of them]," can be exercised collaboratively. In short, it's within the existing power of adjacent counties to enter into a 28E Agreement to govern jointly the signatory counties in virtually every respect. There's no need for far-sighted, money-conscious local leaders to wait for state legislators to proceed with saving big money for taxpayers without compromising governmental transparency. And that's in Supervisor salary-savings alone. Throw in the need for only one Recorder, one Treasurer, one Sheriff, one County Administrator, one County Engineer, etc., and the savings start to represent real money. With more adjacent counties joining into a 28E Agreement, the savings are multiplied many times.



Take Adams County as an example. It has Cass, Adair, Union, Taylor, and Montgomery Counties adjacent to it. Choosing a 28E Agreement with just Adair County, that also has five Supervisors, would save more than half a million dollars in Supervisor salaries alone.

Among those six contiguous counties there are 19 County Supervisors serving a combined population of 55,258 residents, for a ratio of 2,908 residents for each Supervisor (remember, Polk County has a ratio of 86,128 per Supervisor). Going to five Supervisors from 19 would save, right off the top, nearly \$1.5 million in taxpayer dollars without compromising governmental transparency. Thanks to modern technology and an astute IT director that they could collectively afford, they could easily go to a single Recorder, a single Treasurer, a single Sheriff, a single County Engineer, etc., and the tax savings goes from great to astronomical. The Supervisors could house different current county-wide offices in their respective courthouses and not bother with saving any money by closing any of those courthouses.

In the name of saving money, counties should not wait for the state legislature, and they should not follow the lead of Linn county and surrender governmental transparency in the process. Rather, they should search adjacent counties for far-sighted leadership that is truly committed to saving both money and preserving governmental transparency. We are paying too much for governance. We should protect maximum governmental transparency. We don't have to choose between the two. Thanks to the opportunity afforded by 28E Agreements, we can have the cake and eat it too.

A Martyr for Our Community

by Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday morning, March 1, 2019, was John-Paul Chaisson-Cárdenas, the former State Director of Iowa 4-H who gained unwanted nationwide notoriety last August when he was suddenly dismissed from his post, after Iowa State Extension (who manages Iowa 4-H) received a barrage of criticism from national religious hate-groups that objected to proposals he had made for proactively including LGBTQ+ youth in Iowa 4-H. John-Paul described in some detail his successes during his nearly four years in the 4-H job, as well as an amazing life-journey from Guatemala to Iowa.

John-Paul was the first Latino to take a leadership position in the century-plus history of the 4-H organization. His “strong background in working with underrepresented populations” was cited by ISU Extension in their announcement of his hiring – yet his termination came shortly after he suggested a policy that would have allowed transgender 4-H members to use the bathrooms, locker rooms, and overnight accommodations that correspond to their gender identity. The proposal drew rebukes from conservative religious groups and resulted in tons of complaints submitted to Iowa 4-H. After his policy was proposed, groups like the Liberty Counsel (a law and policy firm that promotes “Christian” values and is listed on the Southern Poverty Law Center Hate Watch) targeted Chaisson-Cárdenas by name, sending thousands of racially charged and homophobic communications to Iowa State University’s leadership.

When he was asked later why he promoted the positive outreach to transgender youth, John-Paul responded, “To me, there is a very strong affinity between what happens with LGBTQ youth and what happens with immigrants, what happens with youth of color, what happens with kids with disabilities.... It’s all the same type of oppression and discrimination and hate for who you are as a person. To me, there’s no true difference, and I just could not abide by that.” He went on to say of his firing: “It’s been really hard for my family and me. We’re not rich. We’re supporting our parents. We’re just plain ordinary folks who, if you lose an income, it’s a huge deal.”

John-Paul’s modesty and strength were mightily impressive: as FFBC member Gary Moore wrote on Facebook, “I felt honored to be in the presence of a man who will stand as an ally, a martyr for the protection of my rights and the rights of the LGBTQ community. John-Paul Chaisson-Cárdenas received one of the few standing ovations the membership gives to speakers.”

You can hear, or re-hear, a complete audio recording of John-Paul Chaisson-Cárdenas’s talk and the Q&A following, by going to our Website, <ffbc Iowa.org>, and clicking on the “Speakers” tab.



Photo by Gary Moore

John-Paul Chaisson-Cárdenas has decades of experience leading programs and organizations in the anti-poverty, child welfare, and public education arenas, and more than 20 years’ experience in community development. Born into a rural family of Mayan ancestry, he and his sister spent their childhoods in the thick of the brutally violent Guatemalan Civil War, during which their mother, a teacher, was for a while “disappeared.” A difficult and expensive flight north found them reunited with their father, who had found work as a meat packer in Wyoming, and John-Paul started high school there not knowing a word of English. His extraordinary academic talent has earned him two bachelor’s degrees: one in sociology from Saint Mary University in Leavenworth, Kansas, and one in international relations and multiculturalism from Saint Mary of the Plains College in Dodge City, Kansas. He has further earned a Master of Social Work from the University of Iowa, and has completed course work at the U of I for his interdisciplinary Ph.D. in cross-cultural competence education and training.

Most of this education John-Paul has achieved while working, at first as a meat-packer like his father, more recently as a professional working with underrepresented populations: in public policy at the local, state, and national levels; and in social research and evaluation. He has been recognized at the national level for his work transforming large civic and governmental systems towards equity. This includes overseeing Civil Right Compliance and Educational Achievement Gap reduction efforts for 295 school districts in Washington State, leading multi-million dollar community-change efforts to reduce poverty among youth and families of color, and leading state and federal law, policy, and voting change efforts. In Iowa, he has partnered with 4-H programs in West Liberty and in Johnson County; before he was hired as the new 4-H Youth Development program leader in July 2014, he had been serving as executive director of the Cedar Rapids and Marion Civil Rights Commission. John-Paul was the 2017 winner of the “Powerful Partnerships within Iowa State Extension and Outreach” Award, and his inclusion work was featured in Iowa State University’s winning nomination for the National Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities’ 2018 Innovation & Economic Prosperity Award.

Paul Chaisson-Cárdenas lives in Ames with his wife and daughter, and with his parents and his sister and her family nearby. He can be reached through Linked In and through his company Translation Facilitator Group <translationfacilitator.org>, phone (319) 621-8930. Last fall a \$10,000 Go Fund Me page – now over half completed -- was set up, for the purpose of supporting John-Paul (who is, as described above, currently jobless) and his family, and to help him seek out fellowships to complete his doctoral work: <https://www.gofundme.com/team-johnpaul-support-and-education>.



Mark Your Calendars!



FFBC May
Speaker
Announced:

**Zach
Walls**

Iowa
State
Senator

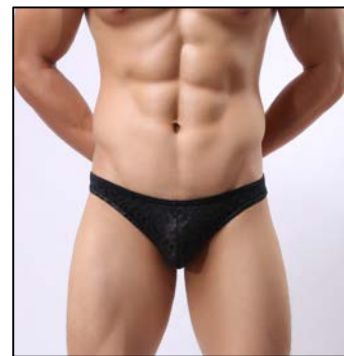
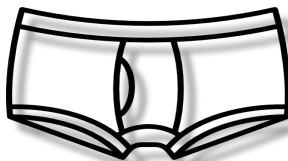


“Gay marriage and straight marriage are the same thing as bikini tops and bras: the same thing...but only one is acceptable in public ...how sad.”

**May your Easter
be as festive and
colorful
as a gay
wedding!**



Briefs & Shorts:



Thanks to **York Taenzer** for introducing our March speaker, **John-Paul Chaisson-Cardena**. He was fired as head of Iowa 4-H because of his support for trans youth. Thanks also to **Jordan Duesenberg** for his work on the FFBC website. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter production editor. Thanks to **Ryan Weidner** for his work as our technology guru. *Thanks to all our contributors to the monthly newsletter!*

A special thank-you to those FFBC members and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the Donor Direct program of United Way. The contributions through United Way are tax deductible. Those who have chosen this means of supporting FFBC have gone to the trouble of completing their United Way campaign worksheet by designating FFBC as the beneficiary of their generosity. FFBC is an eligible recipient of such funding designations.

The next copy deadline for the FFBC newsletter will be **April 15, 2019**. If you have something on your mind, put it on paper and get it to me by the copy deadline. It'll be interesting, good therapy, or both. Caring is sharing.

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. **Book donations are always welcome**. Thanks to **Scott Kuknyo** for helping coordinate the book exchange.

Consider a **tax-deductible contribution** to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax exempt testamentary gift, or both. We awarded eight scholarships this year. We've awarded more than **\$275,000** in scholarships to deserving Iowa high school students. Our annual fundraising drive is currently in progress.

Don't Miss the
DEADLINE!



STDs: A Serious Problem

By Supervisor Matt McCoy

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are at an all-time high in Polk County. In 2018, the Polk County Health Department investigated 3,567 Chlamydia cases, 1,534 Gonorrhea cases, 177 Syphilis cases, and 45 cases of HIV. What is even more concerning is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that youth ages 15-24 make up just over one quarter of the sexually active population, but account for half of the 20 million new sexually transmitted infections that occur in the United States each year.

Research illustrates that students are not always getting the most accurate and current sexual health information at school. Iowa Code mandates that research-based, age-appropriate health education be taught in grades K-12 and that information must be research-based and free of bias. However, schools may choose abstinence-only materials "so long as those materials fall within the parameters of the law," and parents can remove children from any part of health education courses that conflict with their religious beliefs.

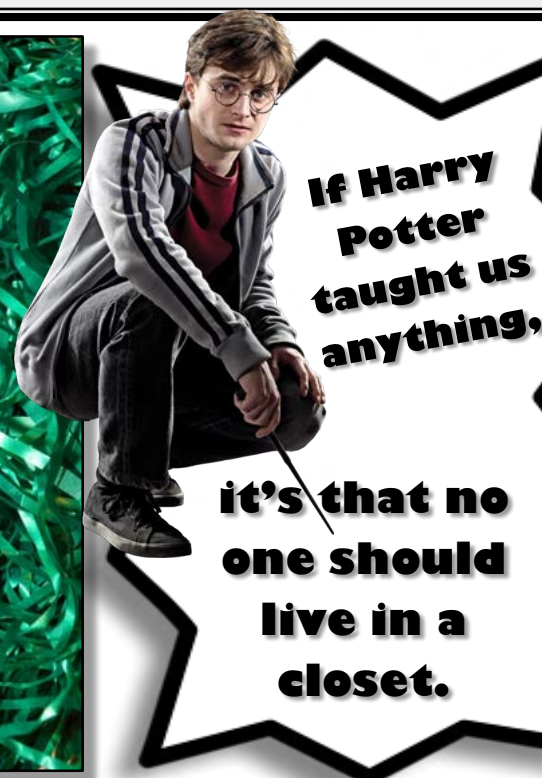
The result of these policies? The CDC identifies 16 sexual education topics that are critical to a young person's sexual health, and in the 2013-2014 school year, Iowa schools reported that less than 40% of students in grades six through twelve were taught all 16 critical topics. Only 36% were taught about all methods of contraception, and only 32% received material relevant to LGBTQ youth.

It's no wonder that STD cases are at an all-time high. In an effort to counter the lack of comprehensive education in schools, the Polk County Health Department is launching a new sexual education initiative targeted at youth, young adults, and adults. It will include a YouTube channel called "Sex n' Stuff" for youth age 12-18 and a bi-weekly podcast called "Down and Dirty" for young adults age 18+. Topics will include everything from reproductive health, STDs consent, LGBTQ sexual health, healthy relationships, and more.

Content will be launched on both platforms by early April so follow the Polk County Health Department on Facebook to learn more and help us spread the word about these important comprehensive sexual health resources that young people need to live healthy lives.



Your sexual health matters



True Detective

HBO Miniseries, Season 3

A Review by Mark Turnage

“Neo-noir” is a difficult genre to capture well—it owes its roots to film noir, a genre that originated in black-and-white detective thrillers of the 30s, 40s, and 50s, but its success is equally indebted to its cinematographers as much as its writers. Part drama, part suspense, and part mystery, neo-noir updates the retro setting of film noir to the present day or near-future, incorporating modern social themes and plot devices such as unreliable narrators and time jumps. Nic Pizzolatto’s **True Detective** captures these themes and updates them with slick camerawork and A-list actors and, though some of the dialogue can be a bit heavy-handed and clunky, the choice to depict an aging detective’s fight against Alzheimer’s as he closes his last cold case adds a unique dimension to the narrative that makes **True Detective**’s third season a welcome return-to-form, despite its flaws.

Mahershala Ali plays Wayne Hays, a former Vietnam vet and Arkansas State Police detective who is summoned to the rural town of West Finger with his partner, Roland West (Stephen Dorff) to find two missing kids. When one of the children is discovered by Hays, murdered and ritualistically posed, the case becomes a desperate search for the second child, who reappears in 1990 as a teenager caught on surveillance during a robbery. The case is revealed to have a decades-long impact on the detectives’ lives, and the story diverges into three time periods: 1980, 1990, and 2015. In 2015, Hays is a 70-year-old man with late-stage Alzheimer’s and an estranged family, and West lives as a reclusive drunk, with an animal shelter’s worth of dogs for company and a 25-year-old secret of dark complicity that Hays’ condition has erased from memory. These three “time windows” function as narrative gaps to increase tension between the history the men share, and bleed through to illustrate Hays’ deteriorating mental state. It’s a twist on the “unreliable narrator” that is both intriguing and heartbreaking, and with Ali’s performance, creates truly powerful and captivating narrative moments.

Film noir characters are philosophical by nature, but it’s a fine line to walk between that point and hyper-poetic dialogue for the sake of writerly indulgence. There are a few moments in **True Detective** that Pizzolatto is guilty of this, but the ensemble scenes, especially the ones focusing on the Hayes family in 1990 and 2015, and the exchanges between Hayes and West those same years, set the tone of this season best. And they exemplify both Ali and Dorff as leading men with nuance, especially when they explore the theme of institutionalized racism in the police force from the 80s to today.

It’s a theme I wish **True Detective** explored better outside of its own dialogue. Granted, the crime and the mystery need to take center stage, and **True Detective** is no **Green Book**, but other than racist commentary, the detectives’ confrontations with racism feel shoehorned in sometimes. It’s something that should feel ugly and scary when it arises, but when Hayes and West aren’t talking about it, the other instances it’s experienced come off like a dissonant note hit out-of-key. Racism shouldn’t feel “organic,” obviously, but as a narrative theme, it needs to have thematic consequences, whether they occur to the characters as physical danger or an emotional toll, or as a clear statement the narrative is making. Otherwise, how are we as viewers supposed to take it seriously?

True Detective stands out with expert character work from Ali and Dorff, and the crime itself has enough layers to keep things interesting but, compared with its stellar first season featuring Woody Harrelson and Matthew McConaughey (who are now the show’s executive producers), it falls short thematically. However, it’s worth seeing for the fresh perspective of its main character, and if you’re a detective at heart. **True Detective** is available on the HBONOW application and hbo.com.



HBO®





Gayest Songs of the 90s

by Jordan Duesenberg

THAT
90s
PARTY

90s

I have a special place in my heart for the 1990s – it was the decade in which I was born (1990) and, in terms of pop culture, it was extremely rich. Some of my favorite music, films, fashion, and television all come from that decade. Although I realize that my memories of the 90s were looked at with child-sized rose tinted glasses, the 90s were likely a very different time for others, especially those older than me and in the LGBTQ community. The devastation from the HIV/AIDS crisis continued from the 80s and despite the life-saving medication that eventually came along in the mid-to-late 90s, the general public and politicians likely didn't make life easy for our community. Even with a Democrat in the White House for the majority of the decade, we still saw "Don't Ask Don't Tell," and the Defense of Marriage Act signed into law.

The music that was popular also reflected what was going on at that time. While the 70s and 80s championed queer music at large, the 90s weren't as forthright, but the queer influence was still there. When disco was pronounced "dead" in 1979 by straight people with no taste, disco never really died; it went back underground with the gays where it always belonged – it ultimately gave birth to what would be known as House music in the early 80s or, as the godfather of House music, Frankie Knuckles, called "Disco's Revenge." House would become popular in the 1980s, but it became a world dominating force in the 90's inspiring much of the pop that was produced then and even through to today. The 90s also saw our beloved pop divas voice their support for our community and most importantly it gave us Britney Spears – so needless to say, it was a very gay decade indeed. Here is my list of the five gayest songs of the 1990s.

- **"Believe" (1998) – Cher** – How do you even describe this song's importance to the gay community? There's nothing outwardly gay about this song, but when you here the trancey Euro beat and Cher's heavily autotuned voice belting "Do You Believe In Life After Love?" you can't help but want to dance around shirtless in a harness with every man in a five mile radius – I don't make the rules. It's a song that empowers those who've had to deal the hardships in life and love, and the gays could certainly relate. This song also got Cher out of a slight career slump and championed her as the ultimate Queen of the gays making music for the gays.
- **"Free (Mood II Swing Mix)" (1997) – Ultra Nate** – One of the best House songs of all time sang powerfully by House diva Ultra Nate and remixed by Mood II Swing, try and not dance when you hear this song. This is a song about living your life in your terms and celebrating how free you are to pursue your dreams however you define them – it ran particularly close to the LGBTQ community that was facing its fair share of challenges during the decade. Sometimes the best remedy for pain is lose yourself in a song and dance like nobody is watching.
- **"Supermodel (You Better Work)" (1993) – RuPaul** – The only song on this list that was from a musician who is part of the LGBTQ community. While RuPaul is definitely not the first musician to don drag or even the first drag queen to break through (Divine had a hi NRG disco career in the 80s), the song gave us the now popular term "work" or as we now say "werk," which is a declaration of support or a call to action. Ultimately this is House song from a man in a dress celebrating how beautiful they are, which resulted in RuPaul becoming a household name and now one the most celebrated queer celebrities today. Truly iconic.
- **"Vogue" (1990) – Madonna** – A certified gay banger, Madonna's "Vogue" originates from the underground NYC ballroom scenes from queer people of color, and although Madonna has faced many cultural appropriation accusations for this song, I don't think anyone can argue that it took ballroom culture and propelled it to new heights making stars out of the scene's underground dancers. It is said that Madonna was introduced to voguing and the infamous nightclub The Soundfactory by dancers Jose Gutierrez Xtravaganza and Luis Xtravaganza. Everything about this song is gay, gay, gay – the disco influenced House beat, the dance, the gay icons that Madonna calls out at the end. It's perfect.
- **"Together Again" (1998) – Janet Jackson** – This is the only sad song on this list, but too good and important not to include. Janet wanted to make a song for all of her friends that she had lost to AIDS in the 80s and 90s and this is the song that celebrates their lives and acknowledges that she draws strength from them, knowing that they are always with her. It's a song that tackles a sad subject that the LGBTQ community could more than relate to, but turns those sad memories into something to celebrate, all over a House beat. Apparently Janet's record label was hesitant about this song when she told them about it, but it turned out to be one of her biggest songs of her career. God bless the gay, and God bless Janet – Ms. Jackson if you're nasty!

WELCOME
TO THE 90s

FRESH



FFBC awards annual scholarships to outstanding Iowa high seniors who fight homophobia and educate their schools and/or communities about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues. Academic excellence, extracurricular activities and community involvement also factor into the awards.

The scholarships are \$3,000 each. The number of awards varies each year based on the number and quality of applicants and the funds available.

Applicants must be Iowa residents and plan to pursue post-secondary education. There is no restriction on the type or location of the institution where post-secondary education is obtained. Scholarships are awarded without regard to sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, transgender status, race, religion, marital status or employment status of the prospective recipient.



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FFBC

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Scholarship Donor Appreciation Party

Friday, February 15
(photos by Gary Moore)



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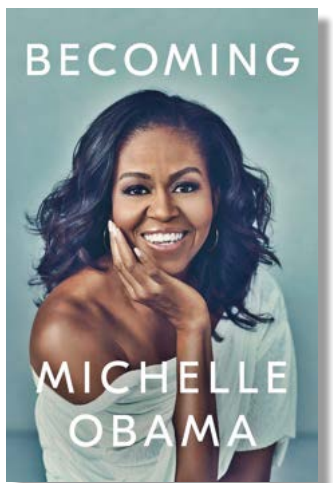
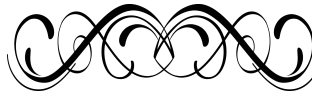
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**First Friday
Breakfast Club, Inc.**



Becoming

By Michelle Obama

A Book Review by Steve Person



Perhaps the best way to begin this review is to quote from the closing paragraph of *Becoming*: “I’ve been lucky enough to get to walk into stone castles, urban classrooms, and Iowa kitchens, just trying to be myself, just trying to connect.”

Michelle Obama is, without a doubt, an admired former First Lady, an adored wife, a loving mother and daughter, and probably the most unlikely person ever to be involved with politics. Throughout the book, Mrs. Obama maintains her disdain for politics and the toxic environment engendered by both sides of the political aisle. Still, she wholeheartedly supported her husband’s decisions to run for state senator in Illinois, United States Senator, and President of the United States.

She began life in a small house on Chicago’s South Shore neighborhood where her mother, father, and brother shared the upstairs apartment of a building owned by her mother’s aunt and her husband. As she observed later in the book, the master bedroom in The White House was far larger than the apartment where she grew up. Mrs. Obama credits the person she became to the values instilled in her by her parents in that limited space. Her father, whom she adored, worked in Chicago’s water filtration plant for over twenty years and never missed a day of work despite the ever-creeping effects of multiple sclerosis. The disease eventually ended his life. Obama’s mother, Marian, instilled in Michelle and her brother, Craig, the importance of making wise decisions and emphasized the role education should play in both their lives.

Michelle savored the educational opportunities presented to her, and by the time she was in high school and searching for a college to attend, she decided on Princeton. A high school counselor stated to her that she wasn’t Princeton material, a remark that spurred Michelle even more to get into the prestigious school. Get in she did, and after graduation, she applied to—and was accepted in—Harvard Law School.

After graduation from law school, she moved back to Chicago and started practicing law in the prestigious firm of Sidley and Austin. She had attained what she thought she wanted, but as time went by, she realized, “...I hated being a lawyer. I wasn’t suited to the work. I felt empty doing it, even if I was plenty good at it.” While at that law firm, she was asked to mentor an aspiring law student from Harvard by the name of Barack Obama. While not initially drawn to him, fate intervened in mysterious ways. One of her initial reactions to this man reminds me of a young professional I recently met. “There’s something innately bolstering about a person who sees his opportunities as endless, who doesn’t waste time or energy questioning whether they will ever dry up.”

Eventually Michelle transferred her legal skill to more satisfying if also lower paying work with the City of Chicago and later with the University of Chicago. She chronicles her blossoming love affair with Barack and their eventual marriage, parenthood, and political realizations. Michelle Obama is an effective writer, and the book is a treasure trove for readers who enjoy memoirs. I highly recommend it.

becoming

10