



*THE
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
OF THE
FIRST FRIDAY
BREAKFAST CLUB, INC.*

First Friday News & Views

DECEMBER
2005
VOLUME
10
ISSUE
12

The Limits of Anecdotal Good Deeds

by Jonathan Wilson

INSIDE

December's Guest Speaker	2
Briefs & Shorts	2
"Good Night, and Good Luck" - Movie Review by Gary Kaufman	3
November Meeting Review - Iowa and the Civil War	3
From the Editor	4

CALENDAR

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

The speaker will be the Rev. Mark Stringer, Chairperson of The Interfaith Alliance of Iowa.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, November 29 to <Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com> or 288-2500 by phone.

I received an unsolicited email from a “conservative” friend of mine. He has a heart of gold. He also has a lot of gold and it seems to color his worldview and keeps him from empathizing much with those who don’t share his affluence. The substance of the email was a recitation of various US achievements in rebuilding the Iraq the US destroyed in the course of our invasion. The point of the email was to suggest that our media has under-reported these positive elements of our post-invasion conduct. For my money, it’s the least we could be / should be doing.

However worthy the rebuilding efforts, that have been plagued by insurgent attacks and fraught with inefficiency and fraud, I say, “So what?” The litany of positive achievements has failed to acknowledge or appreciate the undeniable FACT that the invasion of Iraq was a terrible mistake (incalculably so). Whether the result of faulty intelligence or cooked intelligence, we mistakenly, wrongfully invaded another sovereign nation. The after-the-fact rationalization that the world is better off without Saddam in power (assuming it's true; I suspect that the “world” is probably not better off even if some oppressed folks in “old” Iraq probably are) does not begin to rise to the level of justification for what we've done. It's just that, a rationalization. It's a hollow one at that, given the number of remaining despots around the world with whom we continue to maintain friendly relations because we deem it to be in our economic, strategic best interests. It's made more hollow by the number of innocent people that we've slaughtered in the process and called them mere necessary, collateral losses. Necessary collateral loss is the same rationale used by our enemies to justify the 9/11 attacks on our financial nerve center, military nerve center, and political nerve center (almost). If our military, in a single strike that would cost us only 19 casualties, could hit the “terrorists” with comparable impact, it would be done in a heart beat and the military and political leaders would be crowing in celebration, not blinking for a moment about a comparable 3000 civilian, Muslim collateral deaths. We've caused more than that many collateral deaths in Iraq with more modest results.



JONATHAN WILSON

We OUGHT to be acknowledging our error and, humbly, doing everything possible to make reparations, including the list of purported accomplishments my friend forwarded to me,

(Continued on page 2)

and vastly more. I don't advocate putting Saddam back in power. He was/is an undeserving despot, essentially put into power in the first place by the US, and kept there by the US as long as we thought it advantageous. Hell, we gave him components for biological/chemical weapons, presumably to use against someone. Whether that turned out to be his own people or the Iranians, it would constitute a prosecutable crime against humanity committed by him and anyone who aided its commission. When he was no longer sufficiently compliant, threatened to begin pricing his oil in euros rather than dollars, and had the temerity to try taking out W's "daddy," the decision was made to take him out, and we did.

War crimes have been committed in our name before we took him out, and after, repeatedly and grievously. Bush et al. can avoid war crime tribunals only because of the unsur-

passed military superiority of the US and our substantial "credit card" clout. Bush avoids impeachment only because of the current Republican majority in Congress. Fully 50% (to 44%) of all Americans favor impeachment if he lied to justify the Iraq invasion. He did lie. At this point folks are increasingly coming to that sad, even tragic, realization. Oh, if only we could get back to little lies about fellatio and mere marital infidelity. That would be a wonderful, albeit somewhat prurient, but better day.

My conservative friend is a metaphor. Our incomparable affluence fuels our indifference to whatever it takes to preserve that enviable position in the world, and the status quo. Basically, anyone who finds that status quo objectionable and, dare I say, oppressive, is defined as a "terrorist" enemy. Anecdotal examples of good deeds then get touted to neutralize our complicity in the oppression and make us feel good about ourselves. It's not working for me.

—Jonathan Wilson

December's Guest Speaker



The Interfaith Alliance of Iowa

The

Rev. Mark

Stringer has served as minister of the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines since August 2001. A native of Akron, OH, Mark is a graduate of Meadville

Lombard Theological School in Chicago and holds a Master of Arts degree in theatre from Bowling Green State University and an undergraduate degree in theatre and English from Ashland University. Prior to discerning a call to the Unitarian Universalist ministry, Mark taught English composition at Chicago State University and speech at Ashland University, worked as a proofreader for Warner Books in New York City, performed in national tours as a professional actor, and facilitated diversity training workshops sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League. He has been a board member of The Interfaith Alliance of Iowa since 2003 and is currently serving the first year of a two-year term as chairperson of the board. He resides in Des Moines with his wife Susan and their daughter



Rev. Mark Stringer

Leah. ▼



BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com by Tuesday, November 29 for the December 2 meeting. You can also RSVP by telephone at 288-2500. The featured speaker will be The Reverend Mark Stringer of The Interfaith Alliance.



The following is an up-coming concert by FFBC member Nicholas Roth:

November 28, 2005: Solo Recital Drake University - Jordan Stage of Sheslow Auditorium at 8:00 p.m. <http://choose.drake.edu/calendar/view.asp?calendar=finart>



FFBC member Mark Babcock will be in concert at Salisbury House, 4025 Tonawanda Drive, on December 16 at 7:30 p.m.

good night. and, good luck.

Review by
Gary Kaufman

The thing that strikes me most about this film is how this horror tale from the 50s pertains to today. People who speak up against the government are labeled as traitors and terrorist sympathizers. People aren't allowed to see the evidence against them. I think retro has gone just a little too far.

The movie takes a look at the time period in the 50s when Edward R. Murrow, a CBS journalist, took on the main fear-mongering politician of that era, Senator Joseph McCarthy. In the 50s, Communism was the scare. Communists were supposedly everywhere, infiltrating the highest levels of government. Careers were ruined, writers were blackballed, and all because they ended up on a list somewhere. Even Lucy (of *I Love Lucy*) was accused of communist sympathies. It was a sorry time. Loyalty oaths had to be signed or the person would be fired. Murrow even purportedly signed one.

But Murrow was the one journalist with the courage to speak up using the new medium of television and, through it, he changed the nation. David Strathairn's portrayal of Edward R. Murrow is impeccable. I have seen side by side comparisons of his portrayal with the telecasts actually made by Murrow and every nuance is there. The film also shows the intensity involved in producing a television show during that era. Great pressures were placed on CBS not to run the shows. At one point two colonels showed up threatening CBS that "it was very dangerous ground they were entering."

That threat was issued over a story about a serviceman, Air Force Lieutenant Milo Radulovich, who was fired as a security risk because his father read a Serbian newspaper. No one actually questioned the Lieutenant's loyalty. The Lieutenant was told to renounce his father or be discharged. He refused to renounce his father and was discharged, without any hearing or any evidence being presented against him. Murrow featured this story and explained that in America "the iniquity of the father" should not be visited upon the son. Radulovich poignantly asked on camera, "Will my children be required to renounce me?" In another broadcast Murrow directly challenged McCarthy's tactics, and said that he would allow McCarthy equal time to come on his show and state his case without comment from Murrow. McCarthy took him up on the offer, and used the opportunity to attack Murrow as a communist and a member of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World). He made other allegations against a famous war correspondent that seemed too hard to believe. People started to see McCarthy for what he was, and the end was coming. The film uses actual broadcasts of McCarthy to demonstrate what he was like. Eventually the downfall of McCarthy culminated with the famous footage of Army counsel Joseph Welch stating to Senator



McCarthy at the Army-McCarthy hearing, "Have you no decency?" McCarthy was soon censured by the Senate and the witch hunt of the 50s against communists subsided. Near the end, the film includes some excellent footage of President Eisenhower saying that every American has the right to "meet with your friends or your enemies without fear of being thrown in jail without charges," in America "we required a writ of habeas corpus." This was from a Grand Old Republican president. How times have changed.

Good Night, and Good Luck is an excellent film that shows how strong and effective journalism can be in disquieting times. Too bad no one seems to be stepping up to the plate in our modern era.

—Gary Kaufman

Iowa and the Civil War: A Powerful PowerPoint Presentation at the November Meeting

The remarkable heroism of Iowa soldiers during the Civil War was brought to life at the November 4 meeting by Bill Johnson, Curator at the State Historical Society, and by Sheila Hanke, Civil War Battle Flags Preservationist. With them was Laura Lee Ramirez, a volunteer who is currently preserving the battle flag of the Ninth Iowa Infantry.

Johnson said it is difficult for people nowadays to understand the importance of a battle flag. "It is more than a symbol; it is a persona of the individuals who served under it." Johnson pointed out that the battle flags served as the main source of communication on the battlefields in those days, and to carry one was an honor as well as a dangerous assignment.

Johnson spoke of the valorous deeds of the Second Iowa at Fort Donnelson, Tennessee, and how the flag carrier, Voltaire P. Twombly, even though shot and wounded, picked up the flag and planted it at the fort. Fort Donnelson surrendered to the Second Iowa the following day.

Preservationist Hanke said that the flags are in a deteriorated condition and are structurally unsound. The process of preserving a battle flag takes from four to six weeks and is extremely delicate and intense.

The PowerPoint presentation made by Johnson and Hanke pictured not only the process of preservation but also photographs of various flags that have been preserved. In late January 2006, seven newly preserved flags will go on display at the State Historical Building.

The celebrated Ninth Iowa flag that Ramirez is currently working on will be the next one to go on display in the Capitol in January.

—Steve Person



FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views*

Des Moines, Iowa

DECEMBER 2005

First ▼ Friday
Breakfast Club

Board of
Directors

▼ DIRECTORS ▼

FRIEDHELM BRINKHAUS
D. STEVEN CARLYLE
TERRY HARRIS
BYRON HUFF
SCOTT KLINEFELTER
LARRY SCHLATTER
RANDY SWARTS
DAVID TEACHOUT
MICHAEL THOMPSON
JOHN TOMPKINS
ALLEN VANDER LINDEN
JONATHAN WILSON

▼ OFFICERS ▼

DAVID TEACHOUT
Treasurer
ALLEN VANDER LINDEN
Vice President
JONATHAN WILSON
Secretary & President

Newsletter:

STEVE PERSON, *Copy Editor*
DAVID TEACHOUT, *Production Editor*

Website: www.ffbciaowa.org

PUBLISHER, FFBC BOARD OF DIRECTORS
©2005 FIRST FRIDAY BREAKFAST CLUB, INC.

From the Editor

Cliff Paulsen, A Remarkable Man

One of the best things about the First Friday Breakfast Club is the fascinating array of people who make up its membership. One of those is Cliff Paulsen. I have been aware of Cliff as an attendee for quite some time, but it wasn't until recently that I got to know him. I spent an hour-and-a-half interviewing him, and the affable man I knew grew ever more interesting.

Born in Sebeka, Minnesota, Cliff attended through the eighth grade a one-room school in sparsely populated Wadena County. After receiving his high school diploma, he set off for Minneapolis where he began to attend business school and work at a series of part time jobs. It was during this time that he discovered the joys of gay relationships while living at a Wartburg Hospice, a kind of YMCA organization that was his home.

After a series of jobs, Cliff landed a position at Cargill. He worked there for about five months until he was drafted into the army. In his service during World War II, Cliff trained as a communications specialist and was shipped to Australia with the First Cavalry Division. Cliff loved Australia and Australians, and after the war, he went back to visit two more times. Cliff was sent next to New Guinea to help with the reorganization of that country after the Japanese left. He also became the secretary to the commanding general while in the Admiralty Islands. Up to that point, Cliff had not been in actual combat. But that all changed when his unit was sent to help with the liberation of the Philippines at Leyte Island. He helped in setting up a listening post there. Perhaps his most unnerving and humorous experience came when he was part of the effort to free the Allied prisoners being held by the Japanese in Manila. At one point during that rescue operation, the soldiers were quite tired and hunkered down at night to sleep. It was very dark, and Cliff noticed two soldiers lying on the ground. He settled down between them to sleep. When he awoke the next morning, he discovered that his sleeping mates were actually two dead Japanese soldiers! Fortunately for the prisoners in Manila, the Americans were able to free them before the Japanese could execute them. The Army awarded Cliff with the Bronze Medal.

Upon his return to civilian life, Cliff went back to Minnesota to pursue his dream of attending the University of Minnesota's Farm School to learn to become a county agent. He happened to stop in at Cargill to visit his former work buddies, and he never left. Cargill offered Cliff a job, and he took it. He stayed with the company for forty years and lived in many parts of the country while in their employ. Among the places Cliff called home during those years were Portland, Oregon; Fresno, California; Plainview, Texas; Cedar Rapids, and West Des Moines.

In his retirement, Cliff is involved in volunteer work (especially in the archives at the Historical Building) and making daily trips to the YMCA to exercise. His unrelenting energy is as infectious as his smile. "I've got to start slowing down one of these days," he said. I hope he never does.

—Steve Person