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AFGHANISTAN GRASSHOPPER

by Jonathan Wilson

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CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, February 6, 2009 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Our speaker will be Alice Hoagland, mother of Mark Bingham, the gay rugby player who helped bring down Flight 93 on September 11, 2001.

▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, February 3 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

The story is told about a “scientist” who was experimentally removing the legs from a grasshopper, one after another. After each amputation he would command the grasshopper to jump, which the grasshopper would do ever more feebly. Finally, after removing all the grasshopper’s legs, the “scientist” repeated the command to jump, but the grasshopper remained perfectly still. When the grasshopper failed to move after several such commands, the “scientist” wrote in his journal, “With all its legs removed a grasshopper can no longer hear.”

I was reminded of that story by another one in the Des Moines Register on January 3, 2009 (page 5A). The latter reported that the Taliban in Afghanistan “increasingly are deploying precision marksmen to fire on US troops at greater distances.” The US commanders were quoted as saying that “the increased use of marksmen is the latest Taliban shift to asymmetrical warfare and away from confronting US troops in conventional fights.” The Taliban are apparently relying increasingly on remotely activated explosives as well.

But get this: US Brig. General John Nicholson, the deputy commander for the southern Afghanistan regional command, has concluded (written in his journal, so to speak) that “they are reverting to tactics that tell us they are suffering heavy losses.” That commander should be relieved of his command. We should not be entrusting the lives of our sons and daughters to his less than prescient perception of reality. We should not tolerate his failure to learn from history. I’m not talking here about the arguably relevant history of failure by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. I’m talking here about our own American Revolutionary War history. I’m talking about over two hundred year old history, history that’s been around awhile. History that should have had time to make it into our officer training courses.

Every fifth grader in this country (at least when I went to school) is taught that during the American Revolution “conventional warfare” involved amassing troops in an open field and commanding them to fight until one side was slaughtered or retreated. The colonists, unable to match the far superior capability of the British at “conventional warfare,” took to shooting from behind rocks and trees with remarkable effectiveness. I can easily imagine British General Cornwallis reporting to the monarch that the American insurgents were resorting to asymmetrical warfare, refusing to come out and fight conventionally, obviously because they had suffered heavy casualties—a sure sign of their inevitable defeat and a British victory.

Any fifth grader, then or now, would readily understand that, when fighting, the smart thing to do is avoid playing to the enemy’s strength. If the enemy is superior at so-called symmetrical warfare, by all means resort to asymmetrical warfare. Better yet, have the good fortune of having an ignorant enemy that misinterprets your asymmetrical tactics as a sign of weakening strength, reduced capacity, or both. For “insurgents” fighting to rid their country of a foreign occupier, it can’t get much better than that. With insightful leadership like that displayed by Brig. General Nicholson, can the American surrender at Afghanistan’s “Yorktown” be all that far away?

If we want the Afghanistan occupation to end other than badly, and at continued horrific cost to American taxpayers and parents, we need to focus on a political solution. Foreign occupations are not “won,” but they can be lost. Until a political solution can be fashioned, the best we

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can hope for is that US forces—our sons, our daughters, our countrymen—will not first sustain a massacre and defeat of unprecedented proportions.

A good start would be the immediate retirement of Brig. General Nicholson, rejection of his unrealistically optimistic assessment of the situation on the ground there, and his replacement with someone more insightfully capable of thinking like the enemy. Our troops in harms way deserve nothing less. ▼

FFBC Is Seeking Scholarship Applications

FFBC scholarship application materials have been sent to all Iowa high schools, distributed to students in Gay Straight Alliances and other Iowa Pride Network connections, and posted on the FFBC web page. The FFBC Scholarship Committee is seeking applications from Iowa high school seniors who have contributed significantly to addressing homophobia and providing education on GLBT issues in their schools and communities.

In 2008 five highly qualified scholars were awarded \$2,500 each. This year's scholars will also receive \$2,500 apiece, with the number of awards being determined by the amount contributed through the February 6 Red Party fundraiser.

If you are aware of any qualified high school seniors, please encourage them to go to the FFBC web site (www.ffbcia.org) for application materials and submit an application by the March 31 due date. Also, please consider a significant contribution as your support of this important FFBC program. ▼

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the February 6 meeting no later than February 3. E-mail JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Alice Hoagland, mother of Mark Bingham, the gay rugby player who helped to bring down Flight 93 on September 11, 2001.



Healthy Polk 2020 Community Caucus. An event where attendees will vote on community health priorities. Hotel Fort Des Moines, Saturday, February 7, 8:00 a.m. to noon. Register at www.healthypolk.org.



Be sure to make your reservation for the Red Party the evening of February 6, the annual fundraiser for the FFBC Scholarship Fund.

Speaker Review

by Bruce Carr

Our speaker on the first Friday of January 2009 was Susan E. Voss, Iowa Insurance Commissioner since January 1, 2005. After some amusing by-play about the slightly sordid past history of the domicile she now shares with her husband in the heart of Des Moines's East Village, Voss outlined the scope of the state agency she heads, the Iowa Insurance Division (IID) of the Department of Commerce. It regulates some 1,300 insurance companies (almost 180 of them headquartered in Iowa) and some 89,000 securities dealers. She said that the insurance business provides 6.6 percent of the national GDP.



Susan Voss

Her presentation to us focused mainly on three issues: the financial industry, long-term care, and domestic partnership. As to regulation of the financial sector, she noted that in her position as vice president of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) she'd met last fall with the head of the Securities and Exchange Commission over a new rule, adopted in December, that challenges insurance regulatory oversight by the states.

"We are extremely disappointed by the decision," she wrote at the time. "State insurance commissioners have taken active steps to protect consumers of equity-indexed annuities—and will continue to do so. We are very dismayed that the SEC chose to ignore thousands of comment letters opposing this rule. As insurance products, equity-indexed annuities are subject to extensive and ongoing regulatory initiatives taken by insurance regulators and numerous state insurance laws. The states have a demonstrated record of consumer protection, and we do not believe this rule is in the best interest of insurance consumers."

Regarding the long-term care insurance industry, Voss admitted that IID had at first inadequately overseen this fast-developing field, and had in 2007 undertaken a study and report to Governor Culver—whose 12 findings can be downloaded from the IID's Web site: www.legis.state.ia.us/lisadocs/IntComHand/2008/IHPAF097.pdf. Voss noted that only 4 percent of the cost of long-term care is covered by private insurance.

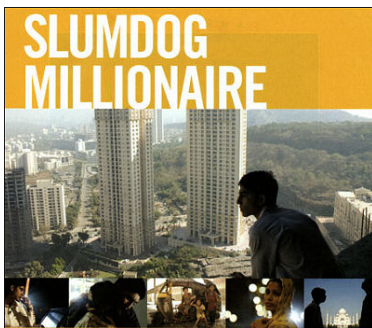
On domestic partnerships, Voss cited the NAIC's extensive advocacy and advice on their Web site [go to www.insureuonline.org and click on "Domestic Partners" for a long and helpful discussion]. It is of some interest that four of the states' insurance commissioners (in Florida, Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio) are openly gay. In concluding, Voss stressed that her primary professional and personal goal is quick customer response—and to that end, even gave us her direct phone number.

Susan Voss is a graduate of Simpson College, with a J.D. from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. She

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Slumdog Millionaire

Review by
Gary Kaufman



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has held a number of different positions with state government including Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Transportation, Legal Counsel to the State Ombudsman, Counsel to the Iowa Legislature in the area of taxation and economic development, and Tax Policy Attorney for the Iowa Department of Revenue and Finance. She has been with the IID since 1993 and was appointed 1st Deputy Commissioner in 1999. She supervises legislation, administrative rules, health care related issues, and the administration and budget for the Division. Ms. Voss sits on various committees at the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, and serves currently as vice president of the Association. ▼

What impressed me most with **Slumdog Millionaire** was the ingenious way the director told the story. Jamal, an 18-year old orphan from the slums of Mumbai, India, has taken the nation by storm by correctly answering all the questions up until the last question in India's version of **Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?** Time runs out on the show, and the nation waits to see how the potential slumdog millionaire will do the next day. The contestant, however, is promptly whisked off by the police after the show and tortured because of disbelief that a totally uneducated boy could legitimately know the answers to these questions. By showing us a succession of the questions answered on the show and the revelation by the boy of his life experiences that just happened to cause him to know the answers to those questions, the movie matches up the pacing of the game show with the pace of the story line.

Sometimes a movie reveals a world the viewer never knew existed. Sometimes the viewer would prefer not knowing that world exists. In this case it is the world of an orphan in a third-world country such as India. Jamal, his brother, Salim, and Jamal's female friend, Latika, were all orphaned when, during a Hindu holiday, a mob went crazy and killed all the Muslims they could find. They killed fathers, mothers, and children indiscriminately by beating them to death. Jamal, Salim, and Latika escaped together into the forests. Eventually they were found by an orphanage group, and the orphans were put to work begging during the day in exchange for the food and shelter they received. Although initially it appeared to be a little like Oliver and Fagin, it soon turned much darker than **Oliver Twist**. In order to make the orphans more profitable, their "benefactors" would tear out a child's eyeball with a spoon or hack off a limb because a blind beggar or a beggar missing a limb brought in twice as much money as one unmuti-

lated. Baset by this predicament, Salim alternately saved and then betrayed his brother, Jamal, and Jamal's friend, Latika. It was Jamal's belief that he and Latika shared the same destiny, and that became the driving force for Jamal to find and free Latika from her world of being a gangster's moll and a prostitute.

The intensity of the story builds, especially when the movie finally gets to real time. The torture ends, and it is time to go back to the game show and see if Jamal can answer the million dollar question. It is at this point that all the conflicting elements converge to give this movie its intense dramatic conclusion. You can feel the tension build as it all comes to a head. It's an incredible experience.

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Jonathan's No-Knead Bread

Start with the basic mix. All you need is **3 cups bread or regular flour, 1/4 tsp instant dry yeast, 1 1/4 tsp salt**. This can be stirred together and kept in the frig until you're ready to start the process.

To start the process: Empty the mix in a mixing bowl. Add 1 1/2 cups of water, mix with your hand (I use a latex glove) just until it forms a somewhat uniform lump—about 10-20 seconds. Cover the bowl with cling wrap and let it rise in a draft-free spot 18-20 hours, or more.

When the dough has risen, it will be sticky, stretchy, and somewhat bubbly. If not, leave it longer to rise some more. Generously flour the counter (add some cornmeal if you have some), and dump out the dough. Fold it four times toward the middle (left to right, r to l, top to bottom and b to t). Flip it over to put the seam side down, adding more flour or cornmeal if counter isn't well covered. Be generous with the flour/cornmeal. Let dough sit while you do the next step.

Next step: Place a covered oven-proof baking dish (Dutch Oven) in the oven and turn the heat to 450-475. 450 works just fine. Wait 40 minutes, then remove the baking dish, uncover it, drop the dough in (folding it over again first if it's spread out too much), put lid back on and promptly return it to the oven. Bake 30 minutes. Remove the lid and bake another 15 minutes or less, until the crust is golden brown.

You're done and you're going to love it! Yield: 8-10 very grateful loved ones.

Note: Variations can be (1) add a cup or more of sliced olives before adding water, or (2) add 1 generous Tbsp rosemary, or (3) add to the mix some other interesting herbs or some seeds like pumpkin, poppy, sesame—you get the idea. ▼

Don't Let The Economy Keep You Away From FFBC



The FFBC Board of Directors passed a policy at its January meeting to allow dues to be waived on a quarterly basis for individuals experiencing economic difficulty which would otherwise prevent them from active membership in FFBC.

To request a dues waiver, contact Michael Thompson at 266-7638. Requests and related information will be kept confidential. Only Michael Thompson, the FFBC president, and the FFBC treasurer will have information regarding names and circumstances. ▼



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*First Friday
News & Views
Des Moines, Iowa*

FEBRUARY 2009

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From the Editor The Zookeeper's Wife

Diane Ackerman's *The Zookeeper's Wife* is subtitled, *A War Story*. The book chronicles what amounts to a footnote of the Second World War and also relates the true saga of Antonina Zabinski and her husband, Jan, keeper of the Warsaw Zoo, prior to, during, and after the war. While major battles raged across Europe and Poland in particular, the Zabinskis' bravery and resourcefulness quietly affected the lives of hundreds of people, the majority of whom they did not know.

Most people are aware of the Nazi preoccupation with human genetics and the grotesque experiments performed on innocent Jews by The Angel of Death, Dr. Josef Mengele. What many may not be aware of was the Nazis' enormous interest in animal breeding, particularly in trying to bring back an extinct species known as the aurochs. It was their dream, through selective breeding, to bring this species back and use the forests of Poland as hunting grounds after the war. Their aim was the development of "pure Aryan game."

While most of the Warsaw Zoo's animals were either exported to zoos in Germany or simply slaughtered for sport, Antonina and Jan managed to convince the Nazis not to destroy their zoo buildings but instead use the facilities as a pig farm to provide food for the German occupiers. While it was important to Jan not to have his zoo destroyed, it was even more important to him because he was a key member of the Polish Underground, and the zoo's grounds and proximity to the city were vital for the clandestine fight against the invaders.

With their pig farm operation underway, Jan had unlimited access to the Warsaw Ghetto where he would pick up scraps and garbage to feed to his pigs. The Ghetto housed thousands of Jews who were kept prisoners in their own city and treated far worse than any animals. Jan's resourcefulness allowed him to smuggle many Jews out of the Ghetto, hide them temporarily in the zoo's barns and cages, and then assist them in getting away to the countryside where they were less likely to be murdered. He and Antonina did this for humanity's sake; they were not Jews themselves.

The horrors of the war, especially the harshness heaped upon the Poles, makes one wonder what he would do today in America if faced with a similar situation. This country has its own sorry history of confining and removing large groups of people, "inferiors" as it were. The sad march of the Cherokees from the southern United States to west of the Mississippi is a case in point. Another is the misguided roundup and internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. A modern day example might be our treatment of undocumented immigrants.

Antonina Zabinski kept a journal of these events, and it is from this journal that Diane Ackerman portrays this woman's struggles, along with her husband and children, during one of the darkest periods in world history. It is a fascinating book and one that I would recommend as a good read.

—Steve Person

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Slumdog Millionaire won 4 Golden Globe awards including Best Movie—Drama, Best Director, Best Screenplay, and Best Original Score, and it is certain to be nominated for "Best Picture" at the academy awards. I highly recommend seeing this film. ▼

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