

# Views: VT's Great Gay American

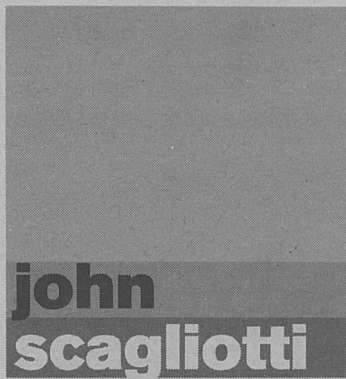
**D**own the dirt road from my farm a good friend of mine is buried in an old graveyard. Ron Squires and I were both young and idealistic when we met back in the 1970s at a commune in Guilford. He was quick to tell me how proud he was to be an eighth generation Vermonter. And just as quickly he told me he was gay.

In those days most folks didn't come right out and say it. But Ron Squires was a surprisingly candid young man. He was also a self-appointed guardian of Vermont traditions.

Ronnie baked apple pies for the Grange benefits and took kids from our school into dilapidated cemeteries to help clean them up. One of those graveyards is where he's buried now.

So you can imagine my dismay when I picked up the local newspaper recently with the headline stating that Ron's grave had been defaced. The front-page picture of his mom, Shirley Squires, standing bravely with her fingers slightly touching her son's headstone, was heartbreaking. When Shirley told the police about the vandalism, they asked if Ron had any enemies. She could think of no one.

The vandal had carved anti-gay graffiti into Ron's gray



**John Scagliotti**

Guilford slate gravestone.

Just last month I had occasion to remember Ron's courage during a discussion over dinner with friends the day New Jersey Governor James McGreevey announced that he would be resigning his office. The Governor went on to call himself a Gay American.

I thought it was pretty sad that he used that term only at the time of scandal. But had he earlier in life come clean about his sexual identity I'm certain the chances of his being Governor would have been pretty slim.

And that brings me back to Ronnie. He was also a politician. In fact, he became the first openly gay one elected to our Vermont legislature, but it hadn't been easy for Ron.

Had Ronnie stayed dishonest about his true identity he too might have gone further in his political career like the Governor. Except many gay people like Ronnie who came out early in their careers didn't just roll over. No, they did the important political work that was needed to change the conditions that would make it possible for younger gays today to accomplish more of their dreams. As soon as Ron was in the legislature, he spoke eloquently on the need to end discrimination. With Ron's voice ringing in their ears, the legislators passed Vermont's anti-gay discrimination bill in 1992, the fourth state in the nation to do so. Ron passed away a few months after that major victory.

Already there are plans afoot by the many friends he left behind to fix the tombstone. And well they should because under that slate slab rests a good Vermonter and truly a great Gay American. ▼

*John Scagliotti is a radio broadcaster and documentary filmmaker. He created the PBS TV series In the Life and is the producer of the Emmy Award-winning film Before Stonewall. He lives in Guilford.*

## Mandate

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to the lesbian mothers who have lost custody of their kids. This is bad fruit.

And what of countries where gay people lack basic legal protections? What is the fruit borne in countries, for instance, whose bishops label homosexuality satanic? Archbishop Nkoyoyo of Uganda is one such bishop. In Uganda, "carnal knowledge against the order of nature" is a criminal act. The maximum sentence is life imprisonment. Some who have been convicted under this law report being tortured and raped while in prison. But a gay person needn't wait for the law to catch up with him or her. RadioNetherlands reported from Uganda in January 2004 that an 18-year old high

school student was publicly caned by school authorities after it was revealed that she was a lesbian. She died a few days later from her wounds. This is bad fruit.

When religious dogma fuels the violent persecution of an entire class of people, it is wrong, and it is time for our church to stand up and say so.

As Episcopalians work to heal the rifts that threaten our church, I worry that we will succumb to the temptation to gloss over the damage that conservative theology has done and is doing to sexual minorities. I worry that those who supported Gene Robinson's consecration will fail to say that, indeed, our actions are rooted firmly in God's call as revealed in the Bible. I worry that we will continue to be viewed as the church that side-stepped scripture in order to do the "polite"

thing.

Perhaps most of all, I worry that we send a message to ourselves that it is okay to let injustices stand. If we truly put God at the center of our lives, then we are expected to build a world that is governed by two rules: love and justice. On this point, the Bible could not be clearer. ▼

*Liz Stedman is a candidate for Holy Orders in the Diocese of Vermont and lives with her civil union spouse and son in Burlington. For a copy of the entire sermon, contact Liz at [ems@kse50.com](mailto:ems@kse50.com).*

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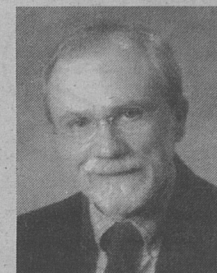
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