

## Jim Morgan: Human Rights Commissioner and openly gay man

Cleland E. Selby

**WATERBURY** -- In 1988, Jim Morgan was recognized as Social Worker of the Year. Jim Morgan currently is a psychiatric social worker at the Vermont State Hospital in Waterbury. Also in 1988, Jim Morgan was appointed as one of the five commissioners of the newly created Vermont Human Rights Commission (HRC). Jim Morgan is openly gay.

Jim, along with the other members of the HRC, is being sued for one million dollars by one of the persons the Commission determined as a violator of others' civil rights. "I never envisioned that this whole process could become so contentious," Jim said in a voice reflecting sadness, not anger.

Jim is very unlike most political appointees. Prior to his appointment, he had no personal contact with then-Governor Madeleine Kunin. But on a very regular basis he wrote her informative letters about hate crimes that were being committed in the state. And on a very regular basis she responded to his correspondence with her own letters. "And I think that's got to be why I was appointed."

One of the concerns Jim raised about the public hearings is that one basic piece of information seems to have been lost. Approximately fifty percent of the allegations brought to the HRC have been determined to be based upon reasonable grounds. The other fifty percent have not.

"We have been very careful to use the established standards when we hear cases. There are different standards for different situations." When one speaks with Jim, one quickly becomes aware of how committed he has been to the responsibilities he has assumed as a Commission member.

Jim's term expires in July. "I have had a lot of very good support from a lot of people, including the gay and lesbian community." This year could be the year that Vermont lesbians and gay men show their support for Jim by contacting Governor Dean, requesting that Jim's record speak for itself, and in so doing speak of the need for his reappointment. ▼

doesn't happen too often. The rest have to eke out a living with cult followings.

Gay and lesbian musicians know that more than anybody. Despite how much talent one may have, breaking into the big time is nearly impossible unless s/he denies certain aspects of his/her life. That is why Doug Stevens and The Outband will never sign on with a major label. Besides, he is gay and proud and not about to go back into the closet to suit anybody. His album, *Out in the Country*, is typical of independent releases in that distribution can be difficult. The album has been out awhile, however, it has only been recently that I've been able to get a copy of it.

I am happy to say that it was worth the wait. Stevens has a twangy voice reminiscent somewhat of George Jones. Unlike Jones, Stevens sings songs like "White Trash": "I'm pure white trash from Tupelo / that's 'bout as country as you can go. / 'Bout manners and class, I don't give a hoot, / I'm from the sticks and I'm queer to boot." The title song tells about growing up gay "out in the country". I think "Born in Mississippi" touches a nerve that ought to be familiar to any gay or lesbian coming from rural areas: "But Mississippi you're calling me now, / from the city where I have lived for too long. / Mississippi let go of my heart. / How can a man like me go back to Mississippi?" Stevens also has a couple of AIDS related songs, "H.I.V. Blues", sort of a modern-day version of "T.B. Blues", and "Act Up", a rallying cry for justice and a cure.

His backing band, the Outland, is very good, featuring some very talented players such as Nydia "Liberty" Mata, who has been active in women's music for a long time, on percussion and vocals, John Cordes on fiddle and mandolin, and Desiree on guitar and vocals (she has the lead vocals on the song "Cactus Country"). You can almost imagine yourself line dancing or two-stepping to these guys.

Let's hope that this isn't the last we'll hear from Doug Stevens and the Outband. It's great to hear gay-affirming country for once, especially country music done as well as this. Nashville doesn't know what it's missing.

You can get *Out in the Country* from Outcast Productions; 38-11 Ditmars Blvd.; Suite #234; Astoria, NY 11105. It is available in both CD and cassette. ▼

TELEPHONE (802) 524-9595

CAROL L. THAYER, M.D.  
FAMILY PRACTICE

OFFICE HOURS  
BY APPOINTMENT

R. D. 2, BOX 1160  
FAIRFAX, VERMONT 05454

100 Acres • Pool  
Hot Tub • Trails

20 Charming Rooms  
Peace & Privacy

The  
*Highlands Inn*

P.O. Box 118  
Bethlehem, NH 03574  
(603) 869-3978

A LESBIAN PARADISE