Exclusive Steve Dain Interview

A Prisoner Of Sex Escap

by John Bryan

Emeryville, California is a pocket-sized industrial wasteland sandwiched between Berkeley, Oakland and the bay. Established in 1896, it was named after stonemason Joseph Emery, the last proletarian to significantly influence the city administrators who jealously guard the interests of tax-sheltered bit business and 1,500 occupants of the fancy new Watergate apartments, while ignoring the needs of 2,500 mostly-poor, mostly-black ghetto-dwellers who live to the east.

Emeryville is famous for slums, famous for corruption and police brutality. (Tyrone Guyton was killed by police here in 1973.) In the last few months, it has also become famous for Steve Dain -- formerly Doris Richards -- one of the first transsexuals in America with the guts to insist that a change of gender should not deprive a well-qualified teacher of the right to continue working in a public high school.

Steve, an attractive and well-read 37-year-old, has never been given to causes, rash acts or the desire for notoriety. But he could not possibly have chosen a worse place to make his stand.

Superintendent Lewis Stommel, a know-nothing conservative who refuses to even talk to the press, is determined to kick Dain out of his tiny, three-school system. He's using every dirty trick in the books and, if they fail, he's prepared to dream up some more.

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Despite strong support from teachers -- who voted 33 to two for Dain -- and from most of the students who've known and loved the former Doris for years, it looks like an uneven contest doomed to drag through the courts and the headlines for years. Emeryville is not even ready for the 20th Century -- far less for Steve Dain.

In a candid and exclusive interview recently, Steve explained his predicament to the **Barb**. He described his troubled, isolated childhood in Oakland (less than a mile from Emery High), his great interest in athletics (both his bar-owner father and his mother were athletes), his years of study at U.C. Berkeley (where he received a master's degree and is now near completion of a Ph.D.), the 10 years at Emery in charge of the girls' physical education program, the search for his own identity and the decision to switch from the female to the male gender.

Despite all the furor, Dain appears to be a surprisingly "average" school teacher who's made it in the profession -- middle-class, upper-middle income ($20,000 per annum), resident for seven years of a neat tract house in Union City complete with swimming pool, recreation room, pens for his pet racoon and the dogs. (It should not be surprising that Steve's favorite dog is the Great Dane.)

He drives a nearly-new Detroit car complete with stereo and a small painted plaque glued on the glove compartment which says, "Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

Hardly the kind of "troublemaker" whose presence, according to Superintendent Stommel, would automatically "disrupt" an entire high school.

"The only fight I ever put up before," explained Steve, "was for girls' athletics at the high school, a fight within the system itself. And that was because we have a fantastic group of girls and they wanted to compete and so I fought very hard. . . I'm fighting as an American citizen for my life, not as a transsexual for other transsexuals. It doesn't mean I'm on the bandwagon for you as a citizen or anybody else because I think that all of us have a right to fight for ourselves. Maybe this will give courage to other people to fight for their beliefs, too. We're a lot stronger as Americans than we really believe we are. . ."

Dain is a well-muscled, blue-eyed brunette. He's five-feet-three-inches tall and weighs 145 pounds. His voice is naturally husky. He wears a short, neatly-trimmed beard and his arms and chest are also hairy. (No visible scars remain after the mastectomy.) He seems calm, well adjusted, quite naturally male and very happy these days.

Quite a change from the tormented Doris Richards.

"I was always in conflict with myself inside," he recalled. "I didn't share my life with many people. I'll say this -- I've always been happy at my job at school and I've always been happy in my own home. But the gap between those two places was the place I had suffered the most with my own identity. . .A year or so ago things were getting tight for me. I was beginning to be more of a recluse which is quite contrary to who I am. Because I've very gregarious.

"And the problem was that when I would go out into public people would be staring at me. . .They'd call me 'sir' even if I was wearing my pierced earrings and had my makeup on. And I knew where they were coming from. I knew my own body typing. I knew my walk and I've always tried to alter all of this. So it gets to be quite a conflict. You feel so pent up inside that you can't be who you are. . .

"If only more people could be like the children at Emery. Whether they're typical of the ghetto I don't know, but they're so understanding. They see the person, they don't get wrapped up with whether you've got a whisker or not a whisker. 'Cause the kids used to stroke my chin, the little guys, seventh and eight graders were climbing all over you most of the time. They'd poke at you. They'd say 'God! You've got whiskers.' And I'd say, 'Yes, I have.' And they'd say, 'What do you shave for?' And I'd say, 'Do you want me to have a beard?' And they'd laugh and say, 'No.'

"So you normally have facial hair," I said.

"Yes. I had to shave before all this happened," Steve replied. "I have a lot of what they call the cross-characteristics of a male. . .I've always had my Adam's apple and it's been prominent. I've always had a great deal of body hair which I, of course, shaved off all the time. Narrow hips, broad shoulders, the fat distribution always male-like, not female-like. Another reason why my muscles showed. I can develop muscle mass so quickly it's unbelievable. . ."

These strongly-male characteristics and an intense desire to compete in sports made Steve miserable as a child.

"When I grew up, I wanted to be a boy," he explained. "But, of course, what girl in that day who was an athlete didn't want to be, because, you know, there was Little League and I'd stand there and watch the Little Leaguers play and I couldn't play so I always identified with that. . .I played girls sports when I was young through school and I oftentimes got to be on the boys' teams... In high school I couldn't identify with cheerleaders and things like that at all. I more identified with the players.

"I will share this one thing: I went to a high school football game and I was one of the most depressed individuals upon returning because I wanted to play football so bad and I realized even then -- nope, don't expose yourself to it if you can't handle it emotionally. In other words, if I was going to get that depressed -- and I mean DEpressed -- because I couldn't play that game and I knew I could play as well as those half-backs were playing because of my own speed and ability at that time.

"These were the kinds of traumas you went through but you didn't share them. You know, you can't say to your girlfriend, 'Jeeze! I wish I could play football! I could do a better job than those half-backs!' No, you couldn't say that.

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"I was always in conflict with myself inside."

Not in high school. . ."

I asked if he ever dated.

"It was interesting that I had a boyfriend in high school. More of a platonic kind of a relationship," Steve said. "And he'd pick me up and we'd go to school and we'd hold hands but it never got heavy into anything else. And sometimes I'd get angry because it didn't and sometimes I was very glad that it didn't get, you know, more aggressive. . .The whole dating situation was awkward for me.

"And I was always more masculine than the guys that were attracted to me. And then we'd get into this old bag, you know, the old cliche again. Do you beat 'em at tennis, or don't you beat 'em at tennis. Do you make 'em feel like a man? And I couldn't quite get myself into that because that's quite a bit of inhibition for me. Well you'd try to be a tad bit more feminine. But with me, I really had to do more than just a tad bit. So it was more of a restriction. Pretty soon it wasn't me anymore. So I got very tired of that. . ."

I asked Steve if, as Doris, he had homosexual experiences.

"I was always concerned about homosexuality during this time," he replied. "Because, as I said, I was well aware of that kind of subject matter when I was very young. I had a relative who had a gay bar in Oakland so I knew what this kind of subject matter was and then being DIFFERENT, then you get to that business. You ask, 'Well, am I gay?'

"And I will say this, because I knew a lot about it. A sad thing did evolve as I grew up. As my friends would get close to me, my girlfriends, I wouldn't allow it because I was afraid that was a gay thing. The feelings I had, even the feelings within me. And it wasn't, I guess, until I was 22 or 23 that I had my first sexual arousal. And it was really an upset. I said, 'Oh, my god! All this that I've given up in the past, they were just close relationships, they weren't gay!'

"It was a woman who aroused me at the time. Because what had happened was that I exposed myself to a homosexual person -- although I didn't participate in any act -- a person who was aroused by me. And so, in turn, it aroused me. And it was like the first time I'd ever cried. All these feelings that I'd never had before were there and I was trying to analyze them at the same time.

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"So what was going on more than just the arousal act itself. . .I had always been so scared that my feelings might be homosexual. So I stifled and completely inhibited all of my warm feelings for anybody. Anybody. And could never quite get them out for guys. So I inhibited my whole life, basically. . .Growing up I fit the role of looking a butch or a dyke. And I've had comments like that growing up and I'm not. You see, this kind of thing. So you constantly have -- you're put in a pigeonhole and people respond to you as if you are and you're not. So it gets to be quite a dilemma after awhile. . .

"I had my first affair, I guess, when I was 25 with a guy I thought a lot of. And I enjoyed it, you know, being the first one. I was curious about it. And so I did enjoy it and I didn't have much to do with this fellow after that. We saw each other but we were just kind of buddy-buddy. . . But I always was more attractive to a more effeminate kind of guy. I would have to be, you know, I'd be more aggressive . . .I would know how to ask for show tickets and he wouldn't. I would know how to do all those things while the guy would be kind of just a little mousey in this regard. It's really a trip! So there was this conflict for me.

"I don't mind the sensitive, gentle guy at all. I went out with this one guy who pursued me desperately in college -- absolutely desperately! He was a real nice guy. But, again, a different picture than I wanted.

"You feel so pent you can't be w

"And we went out one time and parked down by the bay. He wore glasses. And he was going to start kissing and all. And I thought, 'Here we go!' So he had to take his glasses and put them meticulously in his pocket. And a police car drove by and he quickly grabbed his glasses and put 'em back on and straightened up. But this was the kind of thing I had to go through. It wasn't a very natural thing with the kind of guys I was with..."

"It's strange how people are attracted to each other. Strange how they react to the person inside rather than the facade," I commented.

"Maybe someday the psychiatrists will do a study on how we really do marry," said Steve. "I think if we do get into studying genders, we'll find that even men and women couple up on that basis, too. If a man is more feminine and a woman is more masculine in gender you'll find them making a better couple than two people who are both masculine. But most of the time people respond to the facade, who you look like. And this is why I now look like Steve instead of Doris.

"Because I had people trying to relate to who was on the inside without the facade. But there are so many people who relate to the facade first rather than to who is on the inside. So if you can match, quote, the facade with what's inside then people will come and acknowledge you for who you are right away. They don't have this barrier wondering quite what's wrong inside of themselves, wondering why they're relating to you the way they do..."

"It's true," I observed, "that gender is more of a stereotype than a reality. There are all shades of gender within each person. Many of us know that."

"But in America today," said Steve, "there definitely has to be A man and A woman. There's nothing in between in the eyes of stereotyped society...So that is why it's essential that I have to appear as either female or male instead of the duality I projected to people. And since I was diagnosed as being predominately masculine-gendered -- especially because of all my cross-characteristics -- it's easier for me to put on the facade of a male to match my gender so that the people out there can classify me..."

The turning point for Doris Richards

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pes Into Society's Cage

was in 1974. For the first time in an otherwise lonely life, she let herself fall completely in love with a brilliant young engineer. They were married in January and divorced the following summer.

"I adopted the typical female role," Doris/Steve recalled. "I was adopting the typical role of what I would want to do if I were a woman for a man, get it? Cook his breakfast and make his lunches and do all the things that I would do. I liked it for awhile and I was really analyzing myself. He knew of my dilemma but couldn't pinpoint it. I told him I had some kind of sex identity problem but I wasn't sure what it was...So, anyway, we were well-mated in terms of sexual abilities and what have you. And, again, something was missing.

"So here we are with a fellow who can more than satisfy me sexually, who was very much a man. Again, it wasn't working out. There was still something not right. So we gave it up. We're still good friends and things like that but we gave up the marriage. We gave up the relationship..."

"So in the middle of '74 you found yourself at loose ends emotionally," I said.

"Right," said Steve. "It wasn't traumatic...I was an independent person prior to this so I could take care of myself... But I began to toy with this idea. And I was still having problems.

"So about a year ago -- in the summer of '75 -- I read this article in **Cosmopolitan** magazine about women who dare

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to become men. And I started to read that and realized that Stanford University had a program for transsexuals. And I said 'My God! Stanford's got it and it's a half hour from me. I want to go over and have my chromosomes analzyed. It's right across the bay.'

"So I applied for the program and at the end of the summer they set up a screening situation for me and I went over there and I was also a phenomenon to them. Apparently because they had never seen a biological female with as much muscle mass and, you know, I projected this duality and they didn't know whether I was a guy wanting to be a gal or a gal wanting to be a guy. That kind of attitude. Until, of couse, I was disrobed, you know and they got the obvious answer."

Stanford's transsexual program (the Gender Dysphoria Program) is run by Dr. Donald Laub, who decided that Doris Richards was very much in need of a gender change. The Palo Alto facility handles more women than any other transsexual set-up in the country. (Most change-overs are men wanting to become women. At Stanford 80 percent of the patients are men-into-women, 20 percent are female.)

In November of 1975, Dr. Laub began to give Doris/Steve male hormone injections.

"I was able to grow a beard in four weeks," he recalled. "So I had a beard and I was completely able to cross-live which was fortunate for me because it soon relieved the stress I was undergoing."

In December, Steve took a sick leave from Emery High, telling them that he had to resolve a hormone imbalance. He indicated he'd be back no later than June 30, the date contracts are signed for teaching assignments at the school the following fall.

"I didn't work. I didn't do anything else but go out into public," he said. "Go shopping, walk around shopping centers, just completely relate as a male appearing in a store... I felt as I explored this that definitely I had nothing but euphoria ...I was so much together it was unbelievable. It was so nice to have that tooth pulled that had been aching for so long...

"So, anyway, I decided to stay Steve and I wouldn't go back to Emery High School and I would withdraw my teacher retirement which is a sizeable sum by now and I would either go into self-employment or something else, you know. Change my records over in January, go teach somewhere else. This was around the end of April. I wasn't going to go back to Emery because transsexualism is not something you go throw in everybody's face. . . I scheduled myself for surgery on May 11."

In the meantime, Steve had a short conference with then-School Superintendent John Baker who discussed the matter with the school board a few weeks later. On May 27, Steve attended a closed board meeting where the matter of his sex-change was discussed.

At that meeting, said Steve, one of the board members urged him to stay on in the school and suggested that he simply be transferred to another teaching position, possibly in English or science.

"So they all got caught up in this," he said. It was four out of five board members at that time. So Mr. Baker indicated that they should think about it. And I said the same thing, because I didn't want any hassle. I wanted it quiet. So then parents got word of it and, of course, the word begins to move very quickly as soon as it's official."

During the summer, Stommel replaced Baker as superintendent. He had very different ideas about the Dain matter and Steve found that the new official did not even want to discuss the question of his return in the fall.

At the end of August, Dain hired attorney Larry Sleizer of Palo Alto to represent him in the matter. Sleizer advised Steve to show up at Emery High on September 2 for a teachers orientation meeting. When Dain tried to enter, Superintendent Stommel made a citizen's arrest for "trespassing" and Dain was taken down to the Emeryville station by local police for booking and fingerprinting. The arrest was later thrown out of court because, as a certified school employee, Dain had every right to attend the orientation meeting.

Further legal maneuvers ensued including the granting in October of a writ of mandate to Dain which forced the school district to either hire him or suspend him. The suspension came on October 18 and he plans to ask for a hearing on the matter before a special arbitration panel no later than November 18.

By law, the hearing must be held no later than January 18, 1977.

In the meantime, Superintendent Stommel has hired a private detective who is investigating Steve's personal life. He also held an illegal "open" personnel meeting October 15, on the Dain matter without Steve being present and an ugly whispering campaign has begun which has made many of Dain's supporters urge him to back off from an increasingly emotional confrontation.

"I could have gone back to Emery High that first week of school without much trouble," he said. "The students had already seen me as Steve and the teachers and the parents and what have you and there wouldn't have been much of an uproar. Sure, it's a curiosity thing at first, that kind of thing...But things would have

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settled down and I know that I could have taught and taught well. The kids would have learned and received it.

"They were proud of me as Doris and I don't think they'll have any hassle with me as Steve at all.

"But if I were to walk back in today, there'd be a little bit different story. There would be more curiosity because of all the publicity. They know that I've been talked about by the administration of that district and there's been a lot of pressure placed upon those students to not get involved in supporting me. I've had a couple of students call me at home indicating that they love me and want me back but maybe I'd better not come back because they're talking about me and I'm only going to get hurt. So a new thing is happening right now..."

Nevertheless, Steve plans to continue his battle for reinstatement to the bitter end. All the publicity has made it very difficult for him to move quietly on to another school district or another kind of work. They've heard about Steve Dain from New York to Tapei.

He knows there's a tough fight ahead but he's determined to win it.