



A Candid Conversation with Gay Legend Morris Kight

Andre' T.

On December 13, 1999, I visited Mr. Morris Kight in his residence in Hollywood Hills. We had a wonderful time talking about our past and recent events. After much reminiscence, I conducted an interview with him, which is of interest to CRA members:

Q Andre Ting: I know that you have being a human rights advocate for a long, long time. Did you first start your activism in Texas?

A Morris Kight: Yes, I did. As a child, I was different from anybody else. I was literate, and I spoke clearly, brilliantly, and thoughtfully. I read poetry and I wrote poetry. I started developing a philosophy of social positions. In 1936 my mother and I were partners in a roadside food stand. An African American family came by and said, " We've driven all across this country and nobody would serve us. We're very hungry. Would you serve us?" I said to them, " Sit down, sit down." I knew the mixing of the races was a violation of the law. But I served them anyway. A couple came and saw us and told the sheriff. I was detained. [But] I was proud of my first act of civil disobedience.

Q Andre Ting: I've always admired your altruistic attitude and actions. You truly care about the common people. What first inspired you and molded your philosophy and vision?

A Morris Kight: Well, it came from people like Mahatma Gandhi and Rosa Parks and a movement. And yes, I relate to the common people. You see, my destiny is to make everyone share in the earnings, the learning, the being, and the establishing. Everybody should have food and a home. So my goal is to lift up the downtrodden.

Q Andre Ting: Why do you believe that workers, Latinos and other minorities, and gays and lesbians can work together to achieve their common goal or goals?

A Morris Kight: Well, we can, and we should, and we must. I work towards that. All the organizations I founded have been co-gender, men and women together, emphasizing the inclusion of people of color. I have recognized that Asian and Pacific [people] have been fully thrashed in our society. It was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1922 when Chinese couldn't buy properties and couldn't get citizenship. I thought that was wrong. I thought that locking the Japanese [Americans] away was wrong. I thought that treating Latinos as inferior was wrong. So I have been working towards an inclusive society, and I have been successful in doing that.

Q Andre Ting: I know that " the Morris Kight collection" is gay history in art in LA. What are your plans for this collection?

A Morris Kight: The collection has a tax-exempt status. It has savings. We have \$30,000. We don't owe a dime to the world. My plans in June are to exhibit in West Hollywood in a massive showing. We'll have everybody coming, the Getty, the UCLA, etc. We have a support group [for the collection], but I'd like to have a much larger support group. I want to say to people, "Look, I built it. I don't own it. I've given it to the community. Now you go and get it into a building and exhibit it, and have studios and have art classes, like you, Andre', you conducted art classes in my place [on McCadden Place].

Q Andre Ting: What advice would you give (to) the young gay rights advocates and activists of today?

A Morris Kight: Well, come out! My first advice is to come out. I say that because not everyone is out. There are still people hesitant to proclaim their gayness or lesbianism or transgenderism or their bisexualism. There are still people hovering. So get out, get out of the closet, proclaim yourself, and commence the process of being free. Learn one that you are gay and lesbian and so on. Secondly, being gay is a good thing for us; it's a gift, and build on it. Get a job, get a credential, a formal training, a house. Think of yourself as BEING: I'm being OK, I'm being good, I'm being gay. Build on that and through that we're building a community. It's not perfect, but we can get there.

Q Andre Ting: Finally, what roll can Asian gay rights advocates play in the struggle of complete equality of gay and lesbian people in this country and in the world?

A Morris Kight: A wonderful question. I think that possibly the most unique people on planet earth are the Asian pacific. I say that with a lot of deliberation, because Jews are extraordinarily unique. Gays and lesbians are extraordinarily unique. The Asian Pacific people represent the most unique talent pool that we have. Because Asian Pacific is broad, is from Asia Minor, and goes across the largest continent through Palestine, Pakistan and India, to China, Japan, and the Philippines. I'm describing people who are vastly different from one another. They have the richest cultures of the world. Many Asians are artistic, Asian men are into fish and ponds, trees, gardens, and flowers. There is a component in Asian men that doesn't exist in other men. And that then is a great resource [for this country]. We have among us an untapped and ignored culture of Asian Pacific people, and as quickly as we bring them into the majority community, we'll all be richer and better off.

Q Andre Ting: Thank you very much for the interview.

A Morris Kight: It has been a pleasure.◇



Morris Kight