

DIANE WILLIAMS: Yeah. I know that-- like I said, there's been fundraisers in the Houston area recently. And I hope that this is a positive thing for us. I hope that it really works.

JANET COHEN: You bet.

DIANE WILLIAMS: How do you feel about the way the City of Houston has responded to the needs of the state?

JANET COHEN: I can't speak for the city as a whole. What I have seen lately has been just really awesome through my own personal connections. Some organizations in the Houston community have been very supportive of the work of LGRL and the Texas Human Rights Foundation. Just last week at the LIB meeting, Lesbians in Business, we talked about the Mainstream Austin coalition. We talked about LGRL.

We passed the hat. And what was interesting was the women at that one meeting raised \$262.50 just by pulling dollar bills out of their pocket for LGRL. We then went to the LIB board and said, will you match this? And LIB's board came back to us three days later and said, we will match it, and we want those funds to go to Mainstream Austin Coalition.

Those are just some of the ways that people from the Houston community and other communities around the state have gathered around to be supportive of our needs right now. And I think it's important to say that that's a local victory. There are some statewide victories that I'd really like to mention just a bit.

I think in our community, as lesbian and gay people, we're fighting for our rights so much of the time that sometimes the oppression really wears us down.

DIANE WILLIAMS: Right.

JANET COHEN: And one of the things we can do to support ourselves and each other, to stay upbeat about it is for us to share some of the victories and stay on top of it. And well, briefly, I'd like to say that with LGRL, during the last legislative session, there's some victories that are worth sharing.

One is we'd lobbied for the adoption of hate crime laws that protect lesbian and gay people. And we secured inclusion of the phrase "sexual orientation" in the Hate Crimes Statistics Act. That was an important one. We also block the 94% cut in the state AIDS budget. And that aided the passage of the AIDS Omnibus Bill in the State of Texas.

We also achieved the adoption of nondiscrimination policies that protect lesbian and gay employees in five major state agencies. We successfully lobbied for the implementation of improved funeral home laws. And that allows final wishes of lesbian and gay people to be enacted. We won the adoption of the Durable Power of Attorney Act.

We worked in coalition with choice activists to prevent aversion of the fundamental right to privacy in the State of Texas. We won appointment of openly gay and lesbian people to state commissions. We prevented the Texas Department of Health from including homophobic language in AIDS education programs.

And what I'm going to tell last is really timely right now. We defeated attempts to quarantine people living with AIDS. And we pressed for the adoption of HIV grant programs and HIV services funding. So those are just a few of the things we did during the last legislative session that I think we, as an active lesbian and gay community, need to share with each other. They are little victories, but little victories help us stay above it all.

DIANE WILLIAMS: Right. Well, I'm going to take a break right here. We're going to come back and talk about quite a lot of things. We still have a lot to go over. We want to talk about what's happening in Galveston right now with the quarantine situation. I'd like to talk about some other things that you're doing, your business, your workshops that you're doing, and some other issues about the November politics that are coming up, the election, the governor, what she's done for us, things like that.

But let's take a break right now. You're listening to *After Hours*, 90.1 FM KPFT Houston. And we're going to play some music for you. So Jimmy's going to get on the ball and get you worked up. And we're going to be back here to talk with Janet Cohen from the Texas Lesbian and Gay Rights Lobby. And we're going to talk about lots and lots of important things happening in our community right now.

You're listening to Diane Williams on *After Hours*, 90.1 KPFT Houston. Thanks for listening. Our guest tonight is Janet Cohen. And Janet, you're involved with the Texas Lesbian and Gay Rights Lobby. You have your own business that you and your lover own. Gosh, you just sound like a busy, busy woman, are you?

JANET COHEN: Yes, I am.

DIANE WILLIAMS: All right. Well, we've been talking about what's happening with the Lobby, and the Lesbian and Gay Rights Lobby, and how we're doing right now, some of our goals, some of our victories. I'd like to ask you a couple of specific questions. What's happening with the November ballot, the November issues that are coming up?

We're about to have some big elections, gubernatorial. We need to talk a little bit about who's working in Austin for us, and why, and how. Who are some of our representatives and some of the people that we've counted on in the past?

JANET COHEN: Well, there are different tactics we'll need to take with this. I need to take off a hat called co-chair of the Lesbian and Gay Rights Lobby because, as a lobbying organization, we're not allowed to endorse any particular candidates.

DIANE WILLIAMS: OK.

JANET COHEN: So I can answer this question as an individual.

DIANE WILLIAMS: So personally, Janet Cohen--

JANET COHEN: Personally--

DIANE WILLIAMS: --how do you feel?

JANET COHEN: --as an individual, I would like to rally all my friends and all the listeners of this show to do everything we can possibly do to support Ann Richards in becoming reelected. She has been tremendously supportive of our issues in the past and will do so again. However, there's going to be a pretty strong fight between Ann Richards and the son of Curious George to get into the gubernatorial seat.

DIANE WILLIAMS: So what would you say to people when they ask you, what has Ann done for us lately, and why should I vote for Ann Richards?

JANET COHEN: Just a few weeks ago, Ann has already met with several lesbian and gay leaders from all across the state to begin discussing the strategy for the upcoming legislative session. Ann has been a friend and a supporter of issues behind the lesbian and gay community in the past. And we know that we can count on her support again in the future.

What we're all hoping we can do is get a re-elected first so that we can indeed implement the strategies. We're already told that her opponent is against removal of the sodomy statute. So we know we've got a fight on our hands to get Ann into office in the first place. Ann worked very diligently with the people behind the scenes during the last legislative session, particularly on the work with the revision of the Texas penal code, the support that happened certainly in the senate and some on the house side as well.

With that, Ann has also been supportive in the sense of appointing openly gay and requesting openly gay, lesbian and gay and lesbian people for state boards and commissions. And that's really important because there are a lot of people in Austin that are very closeted. They serve on commissions, but they're so closeted that they don't do any help for our community. So Ann actually asked for that and sought our help in getting that and made it happen.

DIANE WILLIAMS: So do you think that one of our biggest fights in the November election is going to be getting other people, people that actually vote on the legislature, elected?

JANET COHEN: Absolutely.

DIANE WILLIAMS: Do you have any friends of the community in mind, anybody that we've recently noticed, has been on our side or has been helpful to us, or any enemies even, anybody that we should definitely try not to vote for, as Janet, the individual, of course?

JANET COHEN: As an individual, what I can say is-- now that I live in Galveston, I sometimes forget some of the district reps and senators from Houston. But to the best of my recollection, certainly senators John Whitmire and Rodney Ellis from Houston have been very supportive. State reps, Debra Danburg, Garnet Coleman, all of the Houston area have been very supportive.

I still say the best place to turn for endorsements in Houston is to go to the Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus. The endorsements process there is truly great. And they're the best ones to ask locally. I've lived down in Galveston now for over four years. And even though I come up to Houston a lot, I sometimes forget some of the local people.

DIANE WILLIAMS: All right, so in Galveston-- tell me what's happening in Galveston with your representatives?

JANET COHEN: Well, actually, we need--

DIANE WILLIAMS: Specifically for the November ballot, let's say that?

JANET COHEN: Specifically for the upcoming ballot-- and this also spills into Houston-- Senator Jerry Patterson is bad news. And I say this completely as an individual. Senator Patterson, his geographic territory is partially Houston, Pasadena. He goes all the way down into Galveston county. Patterson was elected by Christian Coalition money.

And in fact, the way he got into office was, they did a redistrict thing to get Chet Brooks, who was the former dean of the senate and head of Health and Human Services, out of the incumbent's position. Chet Brooks was a friend. He fought for Aids funding in the state way before it was quote, "fashionable," unquote, to be talking about that.

Brooks was great. Patterson is bad news. Patterson was recently quoted in the *Galveston Daily News* as referring to AIDS as a communicable disease in a discussion on quarantining people with AIDS. The Galveston County Republican Party has passed what they call Resolution 73, which will be taken to the State Republican Convention in June, that says, amongst other things, that all people with AIDS and all people with HIV infection be quarantined.

When the newspaper went to Patterson for a quote, he referred to it as a communicable disease. I personally called Jerry Patterson to talk with him about how I believed that he misrepresented what AIDS actually is. AIDS is not a communicable disease. It cannot be caught through the air. It cannot be caught through a handshake.

And I think what he did basically was promote AIDS phobia one more time using a media opportunity to grandstand during an election season. Again during that discussion, he hemmed and hawed. He said he's not a politician. He played about how he's not a politician. Yet he also walked before the vote at the Republican convention.

Also with Patterson-- Patterson is still pushing for mandatory HIV testing. Now the thing about the AIDS quarantine in Galveston county is very important. Because if enough county republican parties pass this upcoming legislation, then what will happen is that will become part of the state platform for the Republican party. So we really need to fight this issue of quarantine.

What I'm telling all my friends to do is get Patterson out of there, because he has no idea, and elect Mike Martin. Mike-- what I'm telling all my friends to do is get Jerry Patterson out of the senate seat, elect Mike Martin. Mike Martin is a member of the Texas House of Representatives, has a history of being supportive of the issues that we've been working on through LGRL and through individuals in our own community. He's supportive of our work in the past.

DIANE WILLIAMS: And that's good information to know. What else can people in the Houston area do to support the cause of gay and lesbian civil rights?

JANET COHEN: One of the things that people could do is join LGRL, become a member of the lobby, and be kept abreast of what's coming up in the upcoming legislative session. In order to join LGRL-- again, the post office box is 2579 Austin, Texas, 78768. For people that don't have finances to contribute to LGRL, there are many ways that you can help.

You can send postcards to your senators, to your representatives. You can call their offices. Some of them have 800 numbers. They all have local district offices, where it doesn't have to be a long-distance phone call.

We have a new program at LGRL for the upcoming session, which is a legislative matching program. We're asking people in Houston and all around the state to become a volunteer. And as a volunteer-- what that means is that you stay in touch with your particular representative or senator during the legislative session so that you know how he or she is doing in the House.

You can inform that person. You can keep track of their records. And you can communicate that through the coordination at the LGRL office. To become a volunteer for this program, all you need to do is dial the lobby office at area code 512-474-LGRL. That's 512-474-LGRL.

DIANE WILLIAMS: And they're really good to you there. When you call them up, occasionally, even Dianne Hardy-Garcia answers the phone herself. And you get to talk with the famed lobbyist. We were having a little technical difficulty. We've got some squeaks throughout the interview. So if you hear some squeaks, it's not your radio. It's really us. Please, donate to KPFT. We need your money.

JANET COHEN: For better equipment.

DIANE WILLIAMS: I want to talk a little bit about what's happening right now with you and your life, Janet Cohen. I know that you are a business owner. You have your own business, unlimited potential. And also, you work with the T-shirt company, not for the subtleties. And you have some self-esteem workshops going on. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

JANET COHEN: I sure do. Through Unlimited Potential, one of the things that we do is teach courses to organizations. One of the things that we do is we teach grant-writing. And we actually contract out as grant-writers to different nonprofit organizations. We've worked with several lesbian and gay organizations nationwide, as well as in Houston.

And in addition to that-- organizations are made up of individuals. And with my backgrounds in counseling and in social work, I've taken some additional training to become licensed to teach a course in self-esteem enhancement. This is a 15-hour course. It uses videotapes. It uses audiotapes. And with my professional training and social work, I've got to say that this is the best stuff I have ever run across.

I've been teaching this very actively now since 1987. And the course has been taught to tens of thousands of people all over the world. Usually, they're taught in mixed groups. But one of the things I'm going to be doing is a course in self-esteem enhancement for lesbians only. And I'll be doing that one the weekend of June 25th to 26th in Houston.

It's a 15-hour course. So it'll take place over the whole weekend. One of the great benefits of the course is not only learning a lot of processes, where you could literally, in a very simple way, process the negative self-defeating talk that goes on inside your mind, but you actually learn ways of dealing with that kind of internal chatter on a regular basis.

And those techniques can be used just about anywhere, any time. The course also comes with five audio cassette tapes. And it's just brilliant. Certainly, lesbian and gay people can take any of the courses we offer. I'll be teaching one self-esteem enhancement course over two Saturdays. That'll be June 11 and June 18.

That course will be held in Galveston. The course for lesbians only will be held in Houston on June 25 and 26, which coincides with the actual anniversary of the Stonewall riots in New York. And I think certainly, as the lesbian and gay people, when we look at all the oppression in society, how we feel about ourselves as lesbians is definitely affected when we look at all the events that go on in our lives?

So certainly, I'm excited about that. I'll also be teaching a self-esteem course in July. And if people are interested in that particular course, all they need to do is call our offices at area code 409-763-3400. That's 409-763-3400. And if the listeners are calling specifically about the lesbian course, if we're not in the office, I would really like for them to mention that on the answering machine when they're there.

So as I mentioned, this course is brilliant. For people who do not want to call Galveston to inquire about these upcoming courses, listeners can call a Houston telephone number. The Houston telephone number is area code 713-524-8848, 524-8848. And that telephone number is the Houston Life Training Center.

The Houston Life Training Center is connected to the course called Self-Esteem Enhancement. And for people interested in these particular courses, all they need to do is call for information about the ones I've just mentioned. One course is June 11th and 18th. One course is June 25th, 26th. One course is July 23rd and 24th.

Also, for any of the listeners that serve as members of a board of directors of a local nonprofit, that nonprofit might need some assistance with strategic planning or with board development. I know when I first joined the board of LGRL, I didn't know how to be a board member. I mean, I thought about that.

I needed somebody to teach me how to do it. What were the responsibilities and the roles of board members? And how far did my authority go? And what if I got sued? I had a lot of questions. So one of the things we do through Unlimited Potential is we teach board development. We also teach grant-writing. And we contract out as ghostwriters.

We do diversity trainings. And I'm just excited as could be about teaching a state agency. How to be sensitive to lesbian and gay issues? That is just so exciting to me that I can barely sit still about it.

DIANE

And tell us what happened there? They contacted you about that?

WILLIAMS:

JANET COHEN: Yeah. Actually, a friend of mine runs the substance abuse recovery program for this particular agency. And she asked me to do a sensitivity training for all of the substance abuse counselors. She's just a brilliant feminist woman. And I went over there, and I did that. Within a couple of weeks, another agency heard that I did it.

This all happened right after the HBO special called *Why am I Gay?* My lover and I were-- there was a little bit of footage of Melody and I on that particular tape. So some people in Galveston county saw us on TV. Next thing I know, I got a phone call from this particular agency telling me that they did a needs assessment on all the staff training issues.

The number one priority for staff training for everybody across the board was sensitivity for lesbian and gay issues. And they wanted diversity training. And it's interesting because I contracted to do three different trainings. I'll be doing coping with conflict and dealing with difficult personalities this week.

Next month I'll be doing helping people achieve results. The diversity training is in July. And what's really neat is that the diversity training is the only one of the three training programs that are also giving continuing education units.

DIANE WILLIAMS: Wow. So because we have these credits, more people, you think, are going to take the course?

JANET COHEN: Yes, that's certainly one of the incentives. I'm just as excited as could be because what that says to me is the trends are changing. People are interested now. They're wanting to know more about how to be sensitive to our issues, particularly in light of the fights that are going on with the extremists.

So needless to say it's very exciting. Trends are beginning to happen. Other businesses and organizations-- I've been requested to do diversity trainings on lesbian and gay issues also for battered women's shelters and other kinds of organizations. So more and more non-gay people are asking for this.

The other thing we also need to look at, and perhaps this is a discussion for another show, is that within the lesbian and gay community, some of our own organizational issues that need to be addressed, are issues like sexism, issues like racism, class, gender, also issues of horizontal hostility, not only in the lesbian and gay community, but also I can speak as an AIDS activist and my work with AIDS over the last 10 years. Those are some issues that really need attention in the future.

DIANE WILLIAMS: I think you're definitely right on that regard. We have a lot of anger that's been-- we've been a people of anger. We've been oppressed for so long that's given us unity and it's given us a lot of positive goals of how to come together and fight things. But it's given us a lot of anger. And we need to find out positive ways to channel that anger. And I think that this would be a good way to help work on that.

JANET COHEN: You bet. And that's one of the reasons I do the self-esteem work. You mentioned anger and channeling anger. It's interesting. One of my favorite authors, Shakti Gawain, has something great she says about anger. She says that chemically in the body, anger and power have the absolutely same physiological properties. They all come from the same, the root of the solar plexus.

DIANE WILLIAMS: It's a high.

JANET COHEN: And the only reason we call anger anger is because we're pissed off at ourselves that we don't own our power. And one of the things that I love about doing the self-esteem work is that we teach methods for people to get in touch with what their true self-esteem is, with what power is about--

[MUSIC PLAYING]

--is that we teach methods for people to get in touch with what their true self-esteem is, with what power is about, without being pushy about it so that what we can actually do is channel that anger into conscious activity. So we're not just our own little individual in our own individual world, but we're part of a greater purpose.

DIANE WILLIAMS: Well, it certainly sounds to me like you've worked your personal power to help a lot of people. And I, for one, am really thankful that you're doing that, and that you have these outlets, and you can be such a positive force. I'm really glad to have you here.

JANET COHEN: Thanks, Diane. It's been great being here.

DIANE WILLIAMS: Well, we hope to have you on again. We've got a lot of topics that we could talk about. And I hope to be talking to you soon about some of those things, especially some of your AIDS activism. Thanks for being here. I want to say thanks for the people that have been here in the studio with me today. Thank you, Jewel Gray.

And I also want to say thanks for the music you've been playing. And we're going to play some tunes for you right after this. We're going to get back with the rest of *After Hours* here on KPFT 90.1 Houston.

A tape. It's true. It's a tape. But I'm here in real life right now saying thank you for listening to *After Hours* and thank you for pledging at 526-KPFT. That's JAM-KPFT. Stand up and be counted by helping us keep this station running. Paying the bills. JAM-KPFT, any time--

CREW: Paying our salaries.

DIANE WILLIAMS: --day or night. Paying our salaries. That's right. Keeping us in donuts, not even in donuts. We haven't had donuts in--

CREW: We don't even get free Cokes.

DIANE WILLIAMS: --so long up here. Not even free Cokes. But that's cool because we're doing it for you. We're here for you. If you feel like you've nowhere to turn, you can always turn to *After Hours*. Also, good place to call is the gay and lesbian switchboard at 529-3211. Give them a call, and they'll be able--

CREW: Or call my house.

DIANE WILLIAMS: --to help you out. Or call Sarah. [LAUGHS] I'd like to thank all the guests that were here in the studio with us tonight, as well as those who were taped earlier. Thank you, Janet Cohen and your lovely spouse, Melody. Thank you very, very, very much, Dianne Hardy-Garcia for sticking around too. Thanks for--

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

DIANE WILLIAMS: I know she does. She has--

AUDIENCE: I'm just playing--

DIANE WILLIAMS: --lots of places to go.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

DIANE WILLIAMS: You are reading. And just close the book. girl.

AUDIENCE: I have no life.

**DIANE
WILLIAMS:** Thank you.

AUDIENCE: Get over it.

**DIANE
WILLIAMS:** We really appreciate it. I just have immense respect for the job that you have taken on. And thank you, thank you, thank you. We are not worthy. We bow down before you.

AUDIENCE: Thanks. I enjoyed it.

**DIANE
WILLIAMS:** Great. Well. Come back and see us any time, preferably very soon. Tell us more about what's happening. Talk to us about what's happening in Austin and our state politics. We appreciate it.

Thank you. Susan, for showing up and talking about the lesbian health survey. And let me give you that phone number. If you are interested in doing a lesbian health survey with Susan Perry from the psychology department of U of H, that phone number is 743-8562 or 743-8555.

Thanks for listening to *After Hours*. We're here every Saturday night at midnight until 3:00 in the morning for you. And we're here. Thanks, everybody.

AUDIENCE: Welcome!

AUDIENCE: Bye.

**DIANE
WILLIAMS:** Bye. Sleep well. Stay tuned.

CREW: And in the background, you're hearing a song for the community called "Dreams" by Gabrielle.

[MUSIC PLAYING]