

Remember My Name

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The write stuff: Benjamin Morgan

Portland native Benjamin Morgan, who goes by Morgan, was another of the five young up-and-coming gay men featured in the recent AMC documentary *Gay Hollywood*. Since graduating from University of Southern California film school in 2000, he has been trying to break into Hollywood as a sitcom writer. *Just Out* spoke with Morgan recently by phone from his West Hollywood apartment.

Floyd Sklaver: Let's start with some background. How old are you?

Benjamin Morgan: 31. *In Magazine* put me down recently as 21 and a friend called me up and said, "Bitch, who do you think you're fooling?"

FS: When did you start being called Morgan?

BM: In high school I transferred to a small private school and, in a class of 25, I was the third Ben or Benjamin. A group of cool girls pulled me aside and said: "We can't call you Ben. What's your last name?" The cool girls wanted to call me Morgan.

FS: Where did you grow up?

BM: I lived in Portland until age 13...Parkrose, out by the airport. It was terribly unglamorous. My first year in California I felt very 90210.

FS: How would you describe yourself as a child?

BM: I was a total geek, a voracious reader. Weekends were spent holed up in my room with a book or comics. How geeky is that? I'm [also] a total mama's boy. I have an amazing mother. [And] I was the drama fag...and a band geek as well.

FS: When did you get involved with acting?

BM: As far back as grade school I was in all the talent shows. We did *The Richard Simmons Show*, which was a spoof of Richard Simmons where we brought 11-year old friends onstage dressed as fat people with pillows under their clothes. We'd come up with

Portland native Benjamin Morgan tried to break into Hollywood as an actor until film school turned him on to writing instead. Here, Morgan (center) works with two actors on the set of his thesis film, *Meet Joe Gay*.



crazy diets putting a bunch of gross stuff in a blender.

FS: When did you know you were gay?

BM: I'm a Kinsey six. Full gay, never questioned it. Even in second grade there was a little boy who I thought was cute.... When I first came out to my friends I told them if I ever turn into one of those screaming queeny fags, shoot me. But I sort of have and I love it. Now I'm übergay.

FS: When did you first want to be in Hollywood?

BM: I always toyed with the idea in high school. I was a drama fag and thought I wanted to be an actor. I came down [during senior year] and got head shots and went to

casting agents to try to get a feel for what Hollywood was like. A casting director asked, "What would you do if you couldn't act?" I said write. He said: "Go do it. It's a horrible profession full of rejection and heartache. If

you're not going to love doing dinner theater for the next 20 years, then don't do it."

I had a couple of failed attempts at Hollywood after undergrad. I worked as a [production assistant] for a TV company, but I had a huge chip on my shoulder. I kept thinking, "I did not go to Stanford to make copies," but that's what you do. I lasted three to four months. It wasn't until I came back for film school that I had a reason to be here and an instant social network where it finally clicked.

FS: What's your typical day like?

BM: People tease me about how much time I spend in Starbucks writing, [but] if I'm at home I'm distracted. It's certainly easier to clean than write. I go to the big gay Starbucks and everyone vies for the tables near the outlets.... There are a lot of people not working during the day. I call them the WHAM crowd—waiter, hairdresser, actor and model. Or substitute writer for waiter and hooker for hairdresser.

FS: What did you learn by doing *Gay Hollywood*?

BM: My big honor was the catharsis/break-down—I'm the one who cried—but it's true.

In the last year I've been trying to write teen comedies and things I thought were "commercial" but not enjoying them, and [I was] losing sight of why I want to be a writer and what I want to write.

FS: Did it help?

BM: I thought there would be a little more camaraderie or looking out for each other among gay men than there is. People are ultimately looking out for themselves. And ultimately competing for the same jobs.

FS: The documentary showed you guys learning the rules of the game the

hard way. What are some of the rules for gay writers?

BM: I became a bit of a victim in the show because a lot of the scenes show me taking my lumps, but at the same time it was good even to just get those meetings. I'd been writing in a vacuum for a couple of years. It doesn't do any good if you can't get a meeting to find out if anyone likes it. Everyone in Hollywood's job is to say no. So you have to take it all with a grain of salt and take it all in stride. There's a quote by [author] William Goldman, "Nobody knows anything in this town." [So] I don't think there are any rules. Everyone navigates the path differently. There is no one right way. It's not necessarily a meritocracy where you're rewarded for talent. There's no definite ladder or structure.

FS: What are you working on next?

BM: A kids book called *Dinoverse*, which my writing partner and I are adapting for film. It's half computer-generated and half live-action. Also *Meet Joe Gay*, which is a film about a man whose twin sister dies and leaves him custody of her 8-month-old son. He's very gay, very West Hollywood, and it's about how his life changes.

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