



Dan Mathews comes to Providence

Rhode Island was treated last month to a reading from *Committed: A rabble-rouser's memoir*, delivered by its author, Dan Mathews, the dashing and charismatic second-in-command at People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). He granted a quick interview over lunch, where he kept *Options* enthralled and in stitches, as he tossed off one-liners and touching life lessons in the same breath. Despite the fact that he is cute and a celebrity, we maintained our strictest journalistic standards; he was still, however, able to dodge the question, "Are you seeing anyone?" like a pro.

There was much advance discussion in the office about whether or not to be intimidated by this man, who, after all, is part of an organization known for tactics seen by some as extreme, even wildly offensive, in their relentless pursuit of an end to animal cruelty.

However, Mathews is disarming and alarmingly charming. He allowed as how he does not always come out, either as a gay man or as being involved with PETA -- "I know I make people uncomfortable by just introducing myself," he said, adding that he often prefers to engage people in a stealthier mode. "I learn more that way," he said.

Mathews thinks that LGBT people are more sensitive to the plight of animals -- a chapter in his book tells how he remembers seeing an animal of prey cornered by a group of jeering

Say What You Will About PETA-- Their Senior Vice- President is hot.

men, only to be reminded of being in the same position once himself as a gay teen in junior high. He sees animal cruelty in large part being about inferiority issues, and that the same ignorance and attitude one finds in the abuse of animals is also seen in domestic violence situations and in homophobia. He prides himself on being open and out everywhere: "I'm not gay for a living; I just happen to be gay. I like being out, but I also know that the most dangerous thing is to be invisible."

He is very serious about the work of preventing and drawing attention to animal abuse. He spoke of some forms of animal testing as being "anti-science:" for example the use of animals in tests to prove that cigarette smoking is not hazardous to your health. His book is one more way of getting us to pay attention to his mission. And it is a good read -- it is cleverly written, and he has had some really interesting experiences. Check out the chapter on his visit to an elementary school, dressed as a carrot, to promote vegetarianism, only to be pelted with bologna by a group holding a protest barbecue.

And then there is the nudity. Over the years, Mathews has convinced many celebrities to participate in his "I'd Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur" campaign, folks like Melissa Ethridge, Bill Maher, Pink and, of course, Pamela Anderson (whom he referred to as a "drag queen trapped in a woman's body") He

would prefer that people pay attention because of the cruelty instead of the nudity, though.

Mathews is heartened that his book has been embraced by the gay community -- the cover alone makes it a very gay coffee table item or gift. But he'd like more. "So many of the men in my generation are driven by hedonism, that they were closeted early in life and so now have to go wild. We are too absorbed with ourselves to put our energy into causes. You don't have to be a f*cking bore," he declares, "but there always ways you can help." ▼

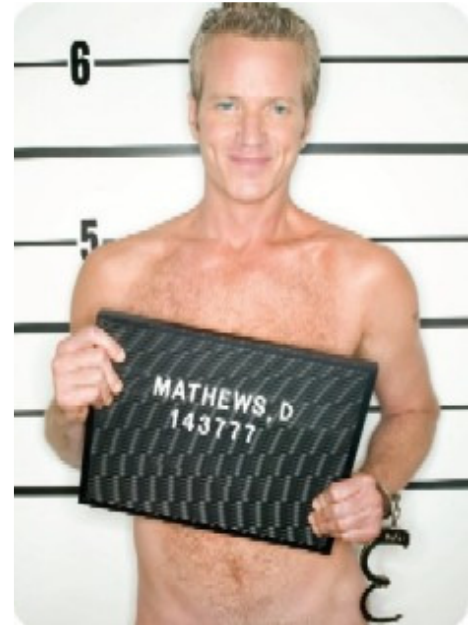


Photo by Todd Odham