

# HOTSEAT- Southern gent? Folk legend moves to town

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Jesse Winchester is way too quiet to be as well spoken as he is. But then, this is clearly a fella for whom actions speak louder than words. In 1967, Winchester left behind his friends, family, and his Vietnam draft notice to make a new life in Canada. One of the most high-profile draft-dodgers of the era, he quickly launched a recording career with the help of Robbie Robertson and Todd Rundgren and scored his largest hit with a particularly inspired single entitled "Yankee Lady."

Later in his career, he grew accustomed to watching his songs make big splashes with country stars like Reba McEntire and Wynonna Judd. Now he's about to get the long-delayed recognition: On February 23, ASCAP will honor Winchester with a lifetime achievement award.

But despite his renown as both a musician and a voice of a generation's disenchantment, he's loath to combine the roles.

"I think politics dates music," Winchester says. "Music includes politics, not the other way around. Politics is implied by a good love song or a good gospel song, not the other way around."

Instead?

"It's always been the same: women and God— that pretty much covers it for me," he laughs. "I'm not sure of the proper order."

Last May, Winchester packed up shop and moved again. But this time, instead of lighting out for the great white North with Uncle Sam at his heels, he rather uneventfully plunked himself down in a quiet Southern suburban oasis, the sort of sleepy county where a llama on the lam can dominate a news cycle or two.

How does his muse feel about all this? She doesn't seem to care.

"When I first moved to Canada, I was really narrow-minded and thought you had to be from the South to have soul," he says. "I learned that wasn't true; it doesn't have anything to do with where you're from."

As one of the preeminent figures of the most passionate anti-war movements in American history, moving into the middle of a southern Republican stronghold during a prolonged overseas American military agitation has given him plenty to ponder.

"From the perspective of someone who once again objects very strongly to the war, it seems that this time the people who object don't want to go too far," he reflects. "The

last time we offended the very people we should have been trying to convince. We called them names, we misbehaved in silly, pointless ways. We don't want to do that again; we don't want to take it out on the soldiers, who are really not to blame for what's happening."

He also points to another reason for the relatively restrained national response.

"There's no draft now, and that makes a big difference," he says. "It mutes the whole anti-war movement. The war doesn't have nearly the same importance or implications for young people. That's a very big difference between Vietnam and Iraq."

Maybe it also means that he'll stick around for a while.

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**Age:** 62

**Why here?** To be closer to our children

**What's worst about living here?** It's kind of far from a major airport.

**Favorite hangout?** My little studio over the garage

**Most overrated virtue?** Piety— the virtue of the Pharisee

**People would be surprised to know?** William J. Bennett is my fraternity brother. Speaking of piety.

**What would you change about yourself?** I'd like to be less self-absorbed, more generous.

**Proudest accomplishment?** I'm a little vain about my French. I think I have a right to be.

**People find most annoying about you?** The most frequent complaint is that I'm too quiet, aloof.

**Whom do you admire?** My mother, my father, Lincoln, Churchill, P. G. Wodehouse, George Jones

**Favorite book?** *Lucky Jim*

**Subject that causes you to rant?** George W. Bush and all his works

**Biggest 21st century thrill?** The Internet

**Biggest 21st century creep-out?** TV ads for prescription drugs

**What do you drive?** A 2002 Toyota Camry

**In your car CD player right now?** Nothing. I listen to the radio– NPR, country and gospel music stations.

**Most trouble you've ever gotten in?** I was indicted for draft dodging in 1967, and then given amnesty in 1977 by President Carter.

**Regret?** Yes. I've hurt people over the years, sometimes deliberately.

**Favorite comfort food?** Peanut butter. Real peanut butter, not the Kraft/Peter Pan stuff.

**Always in your refrigerator?** Cherries in the summer, tangerines in the winter

**Must-see TV?** *Seinfeld*, *noir* movies

**Favorite cartoon?** *The Simpsons*

**Describe a perfect day:** Morning with the papers and blogs and coffee, work on a great song all day, spend the evening laughing with Cindy

**Walter Mitty fantasy?** I want to live in Italy for a couple of years– learn Italian, eat real food.

**Who'd play you in the movie?** I think Alalfa's dead, so, second choice, Harrison Ford.



PHOTO BY JEN FARIELLO

**Most embarrassing moment?** Getting married with my fly open.

**Best advice you ever got?** "Smile"

**Favorite bumper sticker?** "I'm starting to miss Richard Nixon"

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