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I have always wondered if I did the right thing. Should I have come out? Did I compromise my values? Could I have made a difference? It has been something that has weighed on my mind ever since.

I had had to take into account many situations in making my decisions – both to stay in and then to retire when I did. I had an ex-wife and two children, with alimony and child support payments each month. But also, I really liked what I did. It was exciting, thrilling, and fun to be a part of the government where I thought I was making a difference.

Then, last year on June 1, 2001, a headline in *The New York Times* caught my eye: “Military’s Ouster of Gays Rose 17 Percent Last Year.”

Being a gay retired Navy officer isn’t the only reason the headline drew my attention. I worked my last four or so years in the Navy at the Pentagon and was working for the Department of Defense when the “don’t ask – don’t tell” policy was formulated.

Not only was I there, but I worked on and wrote much of the “public affairs policy” that went along with it – the strategy of how and when to announce it and how it would be explained. It was a job I didn’t ask for, and one I certainly didn’t relish.

I sat in on meetings with the Defense Department’s Attorney General and her staff, met with others drafting up the new policy and wrote down all the questions we expected people to ask, as well as the “party line” answers.

On the day President Clinton made the announcement at Fort McNair, with the Joint Chiefs of Staff sitting in the background, the document I had drafted was sent through the Defense Department’s electronic messaging system to all commands, high and low, around the world.

Not once did the words “don’t ask, don’t tell” appear in that document. I remember sitting in those meetings and hearing people object to the terminology as misleading. Funny how it caught on, though.

But for all this officiality, serving at the Pentagon was not what you would call “straight and narrow.” I did discover the “hidden side” of Pentagon life. The Pentagon Officer’s Athletic Club (known as the “POAC”), was a constant source of sex for me. Yes, I was in a relationship, but it wasn’t one that provided me with the kind of sexual excitement I sought.

The POAC’s steam room was as bad (or good?) as any of the steam rooms I had ever encountered in the best of the gay bathhouses in Europe. The running trails outside of the Pentagon were rife with military men hiding in the bushes looking for sex. Certain Pentagon bathrooms – you eventually figured out which they were – were almost certain to provide you with someone who wanted sex.

And that isn’t all. Sex was more or less a constant topic throughout my years in the military. It is amazing that the military spends so much time on it when so much of it goes on – unchallenged – at their own headquarters, as well as in other commands.

Prior to going to the Pentagon, I was assigned as the public affairs officer of the elite Navy flying team called the Blue Angels. It was during this two-year stint that I finally came out to my wife, and we were divorced.

I moved in with a young man I had been seeing and started a scary new life. This was before “don’t ask, don’t tell,” and I was naïve enough to think I could keep things under wraps.

One day a few months after the divorce, my commanding officer called me into his office. He said that one of the pilots noticed I was hanging out with someone (my partner) who “seemed gay.” Then he point-blank asked me if I was gay.

I sat stock still in his wood-paneled office and looked steadily back at him. The words “BOSS” carved in wood on his oversized desk stared back at me. My heart pounded and thoughts started racing through my mind. I knew I only had a few seconds to answer him before my silence would become an admission of guilt to him.

What was I going to say? Was this the end of my Navy career? How could I possibly afford my alimony and child support payments if I got booted out of the Navy for being gay?

So I looked him straight in the eye and lied. “No, I am not gay,” I said. But I had a way to nip this one in the bud, and I knew the time had now come to use it.

I explained to him that if the subject ever came up again, I would not hesitate to tell not only his wife, but the wives of all the other pilots, about the sexual shenanigans the guys played when the Blue Angels team traveled to air shows around the country.

He didn’t say much to me after that. Clearly pissed, he nonetheless dismissed me, and I simply got up and walked out.

The issue was never mentioned again. My conscience is and was not exactly at ease with itself, but I had had to make a snap decision, and I have had to live with it.

After the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy came out during my early stint at the Pentagon, several months passed. I was now working in the Pentagon’s newsroom. One day, a couple of plainclothes men from the Naval Investigative Service came by my desk there and asked if we could talk.

They had obtained a copy of my now at least three-year-old divorce decree. They had not only read, but scoured through it looking for clues to my sexual orientation. Many parts of it were underlined. Remember now, this is *after* “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

They wanted to know why it said in the decree that my ex-wife would have the right to