

news

The Colonel Serves With Pride

Cammermeyer Speaks at Vermont Law School

BY EUAN BEAR

SOUTH ROYALTON — On October 7, the Vermont Law School Alliance Group hosted its annual conference, this year's installment on gay men and lesbians serving in an institutionally homophobic military. A second focus was on the United States government's attempt to force universities and law schools to allow military recruiters on campus in defiance of those schools' nondiscrimination policies.

Keynote speaker Col. Margarethe Cammermeyer (U.S. Army, retired) applauded Vermont Law School as "a law school that stands up for its privilege and isn't intimidated by the federal government."

Then she said, "I love attorneys!" to laughter from a mostly law-school student audience.

Cammermeyer is one of a small handful of servicemembers who have mounted individual and ultimately successful legal challenges to the armed forces' pre-"Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Harass, Don't Pursue" (DADT) anti-gay policy. Beginning in 1989 with a routine interview in pursuit of a top-secret security clearance needed for her next promotion, that challenge was finally resolved nearly 5 years later when she was reinstated to the Washington State National Guard under court order. She retired after 31 years of service in 1997.

And now, she says on her website, she is still serving, but this time it's the lesbian and gay members of the armed forces and their families she serves by continuing to speak out against homophobia. It is, she says, damaging to our country's military strength and preparedness and costly to the people involved and the country, besides, to investigate and discharge servicemembers simply because of their orientation.

Much of the colonel's talk rehearsed her history from being the baby sleeping atop weapons her mother was delivering to Norwegian resistance fighters in World War II, to serving in Vietnam and challenging the military's policy of discharging women who became pregnant, up through the making of the movie of her life following her win against the government and being out as a gay activist.

She noted the irony in being reinstated to her rank as a colonel in the Army Reserve under the DADT policy when there was both a book and a movie out in the world about her as a lesbian.

One reason she loves attorneys is the caring work several of them put in to argue her case in civilian and military hearings. She credits Lambda Legal and the Northwest Women's Law Center for taking on her case. "You probably know better than



most what private attorneys bill per hour. I was a single mother, I was going to school, working two jobs. A private attorney would have been extraordinarily expensive."

She described the phone call from her lawyer on the day the ruling was issued. "He called me and said, 'Colonel, good morning. How you doing today, Colonel?' He kept addressing me

as 'colonel,' and I still didn't get it, but he finally told me we had won." Her case had been successful on grounds that she had been denied due process and equal protection.

Cammermeyer's four sons and grandchildren support her, she said, including the son who is a Mormon. They all came to the wedding ceremony she and partner Diane Divelbess held at

their Whidbey Island home, after having eloped to Oregon for a briefly legal marriage.

In a throw-away line, Cammermeyer implied that the U.S. military is a cult: "As with other cults," she said, referring to her own indoctrination and the loss of her sense of faith in the government and military justice.

Cammermeyer acknowledged some of the servicemembers who died because of the armed forces' institutional homophobia, such as Allen Schindler and Barry Winchell.

Despite the continuing DADT policy, Cammermeyer counts as part of the achievement of her case that recruits are no longer asked questions about homosexuality at enlistment or for promotion.

And, although she admitted there were unanticipated consequences to her actions challenging the government, "I have no regrets." ▼

IN MEMORIAM: Susan Mary Weaver

6/26/24 – 9/28/05
Marshfield

Susan Weaver, daughter of Irene and Joseph Weaver and sister of Joan, Margaret and Sarah, passed away peacefully on the morning of September 28th. Susan was a woman of true peace, joy and generosity who delighted in everyone's gifts.

Susan lived a deeply spiritual life and spent several years in the service of both the Carmelite and Trappistine Orders of nuns. In the early 1950s she traveled to India and served the poor with Mother Teresa's Little Sisters of Calcutta. In later years she chose to live a self-styled contemplative life in the Vermont countryside that she loved so dearly. She was a devoted reader of *Out In The Mountains*.

Susan graduated from Barnard College with a degree in geology in 1946. She later served as her class correspondent and kept a strong connection with her classmates. A lifelong and passionate student of literature, Susan shared her knowledge and love of



poetry and fiction with family and friends. Her love of the written word extended to her own writing, including an essay in the 1985 anthology *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence*.

Susan enjoyed a profound connection with young people and loved to share her artistic talents in both teaching and encouraging children to express themselves by creating beautiful paintings, cards and sculptures. She also enjoyed a rich connection with nature and loved to fish in the many lakes and ponds near her home. Susan was a prolific letter writer with a large and diverse group of correspondents. Her loving letters, playful drawings, hand-made cards, ornaments, calendars, holiday artwork and glitter-filled envelopes will be missed.

The memory of her kindness and unbounded love will always be cherished by those she influenced. In particular her sister Sarah's children; Cyrus, Susan, Sarah, Eliza, Daniel and Oliver Todd, and her sister Joan's children; Rebecca and Matthew Hovey, as well as their spouses and all of their children will never forget the deep love and kindness that Susan shared with them. Additionally, the spiritual joy and love she shared with Jane Jeffrey, Sister Miriam Ward, R.S.M.M. and Sister Diane Gauthier, O.C.D.D. will live forever.

In lieu of flowers and other expressions of sympathy Susan requested that her many friends and family members consider making donations to one of the two following organizations: Woman Centered, 802-229-6202, and the Carmelite Sisters of Beacon, Carmelite Monastery, 89 Hiddenbrooke Drive, Beacon, N.Y. 12508. ▼