

Witch Hunts of the Military

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When I was seventeen, I joined the Marines, naïve to the world outside Rockford, Illinois. One day I had seen a Marine recruiter walk past the open door of my high school classroom, and while I didn't know exactly what he represented (my mother was a hippie and banned military talk in our home), I knew it was my ticket to a better life. My family, particularly my mother, was mentally and physically abusive. Anything was better than what I had to live with, so I couldn't wait to set out on my own. I signed up in 1984, and by 1985 I was stationed in Okinawa, Japan. I wanted to be in the best shape possible, so I went to the local gym twice a day, but I was inexperienced. One day, while I was working out, a female Marine approached me in the gym about becoming a semi-professional bodybuilder. Though she lived at a base an hour north on the island, she was in the area for training and saw me struggling with my workouts. Her name was Monique, twenty two years old and from New York. She was a very fit African American woman with a lot of motivation to share. I was intrigued by her offer to coach me. I agreed and we became friends and workout partners.

Two or three times a week, she'd make the hour-long bus ride to see me. I'd meet her at the bus stop and we'd run to the gym. We'd get in a good workout, shower, change, then go eat supper at the dining hall, where I would summarize my weekly workouts with her and she would make her suggested adjustments. Some people mentioned to me that she may have been sexually attracted to me and that's why she first approached me in the gym. I didn't believe it. I was naïve to the different lifestyles in the world and I couldn't see in her as anything other than what she presented herself as: a true friend who wanted only to help me with my training. In all honesty, Monique never made any advances toward me.

One night after our workout, she asked if I'd like to go up north to her base for the weekend. She assured me there was ample space in the barracks for me and that the person in charge would allow me to stay. Camp Hansen had mostly Marines from the engineer fields and the infantry. Female Marines were a rarity and attracted instant attention. As soon as we walked through the gates, men approached us from all around. We rebuffed their advances and continued on to her barracks. We changed clothes and took a taxi cab to a club in town, where she and her friends often hung out. She introduced me to a young man and told me in private that he really liked me. We danced and had a few drinks. Monique later asked me to go to the ladies' room with her, so I rose from the table and followed her.

I was a little tipsy from the drinks and the air was heavy from smoke and body heat, so I didn't hear her the first time she told me. I went to the sink and splashed water on my face. I looked at her in the mirror as she stood behind me. "I've been trying to tell you this for a while," she said. "I am a lesbian."

What is she talking about? I wondered. *What's a lesbian?* I had led a sheltered life and had never been around or known anyone from the gay community. I knew what gay men were, having seen them portrayed on television and in movies as comedic characters, but had never heard the term "lesbian" before. I didn't fully understand the ramifications of her admission.

"I would never hit on you because you're my best friend and I know you're not that way," she said. "Does this change anything between us?"

I understood a little more when she said, "I would never hit on you," though I didn't understand just how much trust she was putting in me. I wasn't aware of the consequences she would suffer if she was "outed" as a lesbian in the military. No one I knew had ever been harassed or "outed" for being gay or lesbian, so I assumed her sexuality was her business. I felt the same way about my sex life; it was my own personal business. We had always told each other exactly what was on our minds up to that point. She was my best friend, a great coach, and a

generally good and decent person. “No, I don’t care if you are a lesbian,” I said. “You’re my friend and I love you for being honest.”

I gave her a hug and that was the last we would mention her sexuality. It never came up in conversation between us again. We went back to the party in the club, had a fantastic evening and her co-workers walked us home.

The following week, Monique came down to my base early one evening for a workout and dinner. Even after her admission to me, we were still good friends and workout partners. We ate at the enlisted club and stayed for the night’s entertainment, a magician who lured unsuspecting people up on stage to participate in tricks.

As Monique and I were walking back to my barracks from the club, she sloppily draped her arm around my shoulder and told me I was her best friend. She was drunker than I thought she was, so I lightly dropped her arm from my shoulder and said thank you. She stumbled and fell, so I reached to help her get up.

A siren screeched and lights flashed in the darkness. A white military police van appeared, like it had been following us. It bore down on us quickly. Two men jumped from the side door and the back doors and tackled us. I was very small, so when one of the men jumped on me it knocked the air from my lungs. I was an obedient Marine, so I didn’t fight them and went in the van willingly. *Why was Monique fighting the other man for all she was worth?* The man guarding me told me not to move and jumped out of the van to help his partner. Now, I was really confused. I sat quietly as they “hog tied” Monique and threw her in through the back doors of the van. She landed with a thud. Tears stung my eyes, but I held them in. I was escorted alone in handcuffs inside the detention facility. I heard Monique yelling, but I couldn’t see how they brought her inside. It must have been really painful. She yelled so loudly.

I had never in my life done anything illegal. *Why was this happening to us?* Monique was in another cell, down the hall from me to the right. She kept yelling

and screaming. There was a dim lamp illuminating the corner of the night supervisor's desk, immediately to the left of my cell. I couldn't see his face but I could see his bent elbow and arm resting on the edge of the desk. I could see his finger pointing down the hall to where Monique was, telling one of his men to go tell her to be quiet. The man asked him, "Which one?" The supervisor cocked his thumb in the direction of my cell and said, "Not her, that bitch is quiet. The other one."

Up to that point, I'd managed to hold back the tears. Upon hearing him call me a bitch, I sobbed. No one had told me what I'd done wrong. I was brought up with an abusive mother and she at least told me what I had done wrong. The unknown was frightening.

An hour passed. Alone in my cell, I tried to sleep. At about three in the morning, the supervisor came quietly into my cell. He sat on the edge of my bunk and motioned me over. I sat up and wiped my wet face on my sleeve. He told me that my friend Monique was under investigation for being a lesbian and that they'd been watching her for a few months. When they saw us together the night before, they assumed I was one, too. I vehemently denied it. I knew the military's policy of homosexual activity being illegal, but I never thought I would be dealing with it on such a personal level. He said he believed me, but it was up to the investigators to decide. He told me not to have any further contact with her and that the investigators would be in touch. I was released that morning, but Monique remained in jail. I went back to my room, lay on my bed, and cried myself to sleep.

Weeks passed and I didn't hear anything more about the episode, so I tried to put it behind me. I didn't see Monique and we didn't try to contact each other. I assumed she was in a lot of trouble. If the military police had been following us that night without our knowledge, there was nothing to stop them from doing it again, so I never tried to contact her.

After the incident, I met a very nice young man and we began dating. Brad was the perfect boyfriend, charming and good looking, and he treated me well. He was a Marine, the same rank as me, and from another unit. He and his best friend, Chuck, had an apartment off base, and after a few weeks he asked me if I'd like to move in with them. I still kept a room at my barracks, but the majority of my free time outside of work was spent with Brad at the apartment. We soon learned that we'd both been selected for guard duty in Korea, so our living arrangement lasted only a few months. We had to put a lot of our personal items in storage, so Brad and Chuck asked me to make arrangements for a storage unit. The next day, I went to my guard unit's morning meeting with a list of everything Brad had asked me to do. As we stood in formation, a long, black car with tinted windows pulled up behind the company sergeant. A man wearing dark sunglasses and a dark suit got out and approached him and whispered something into the sergeant's ear. The sergeant turned to look at me. My heart pounded. The sergeant pointed at me and motioned me over. The man in the black suit told me that I had to go with him for a while and that he'd take me home later. "You know what this is about," he said, looking over his dark glasses at me. I nodded as I ducked inside the car. A second man shut the door behind me. Through the window I saw Brad watching the car leave, with confusion written all over his face.

Several minutes later, I followed the men inside a building that looked like a jail with no bars or windows. We walked together down a long, dimly lit hallway and into a small, hot room that smelled of cigarette smoke and pine cleaner. Bright fluorescent light hung from the ceiling, above three steel-gray office chairs and an old metal table covered in scratches and graffiti. The first man, who called himself Harry, sat down and placed a manila folder on the table in front of him. The second man, Phil, took off his dark sunglasses and sat down. They stared at me from the far end of the table. Harry had dark skin riddled with pock marks and a flat top haircut with silver on the sides. Phil was young, maybe early

twenties and fair-skinned. Their suits were black, slim fitting, and accessorized with skinny black ties. Phil seemed the nicer person of the two. I sat and stared back at them, feeling more uncomfortable by the minute.

Harry spoke first. "You know why you're here," he said. "You're a lesbian."

I stood up and yelled loudly, "I am not and I never was!" It wasn't his calling me a lesbian that angered me. If I had been one, I would not have taken offense to it. I didn't like being labeled as something I wasn't. He and Phil asked me what seemed to be thousand questions that day. I answered all of them honestly, some of them angrily. If I hadn't seen and read some of my dad's *Playboy* magazines as a kid, I wouldn't have understood some of what they were describing to me. They were disgusting questions, heavily laden with sexual innuendo.

"Have you ever kissed a woman?" Harry asked.

"Yes, my mom and my sister," I said.

"No," Harry said. "A woman not related to you."

"No," I said.

The questions were sometimes repetitive and always insulting or obnoxious, and the men seemed disappointed when they didn't get the answers they wanted. They accused and I denied, for eight hours, with only a lunch break for me and smoke breaks for them. They dropped me off at my apartment that night and told me they'd see me again soon.

They picked me up at formation every other morning for two months and asked the same questions, over and over again. It seemed a huge waste of the government's time and money. Around the same time, there was a female Marine living in my barracks who was an undercover agent for these same men. Under their direction, she was pretending to be a lesbian to ferret out more lesbians. But unknown to them, she actually was a lesbian, she later told me. I couldn't understand why they kept coming for me when she was so obviously making a mockery of their investigations. I never mentioned her to anyone because I didn't

want her dragged into the cesspool of never-ending investigations, too. Why she told me, I have no idea. Maybe it was to find out how well I could keep a secret. Maybe it was a lie and the investigators put her up to it. I didn't know and didn't care. I told her it was none of my business. The Witch Hunts, as they were called by the troops who knew about them, didn't make sense to anyone, but they were mandatory, thorough, and taken very seriously.

Brad was confused and angry that they were taking me away to an unknown location every other day. He wanted to know why, but I was sworn to secrecy until it was all over. I couldn't tell him anything. I did, however, instruct him that when the investigators approached him, tell them everything we did together in the bedroom. He was confused, but I saw a twinkle in his eye as he began to catch on. He smiled, kissed me, and told me he would do what I asked. The interrogations ended shortly after the investigators talked to Brad.

I never saw or heard from Monique again. One of the investigators said she'd been given an "Other than Honorable" discharge. I hope she stayed true to herself. I remained in the military and went on to have an adventurous career, with three combat tours in two conflicts. I traveled to more than thirty countries and saw many wonders of the world that I would have never been able to see had it not been for the military. The night I was detained and the succession of grueling investigations disappeared from my permanent record, if they were ever a part of them.

When the "Don't ask-Don't Tell" policy went into effect in 1993, I was a Marine staff sergeant on recruiting duty. Because the new policy went into effect so quickly, we had to make temporary fixes to the enlistment contracts. We were instructed to draw a line with an ink pen through the questions on the enlistment contracts that asked if applicants were gay or lesbian and if they intended to engage in homosexual acts. I didn't have any opinion of it at the time because I had a job to do. In retrospect, I was pleased that the military had begun to at least recognize that there were human beings serving in the military, not an army of

perfect robots. I have always thought highly of the military justice system and would never say anything derogatory toward it. The system is in place to keep good order and discipline within the ranks. And, for the most part, it works. But the laws and rules that govern the military justice system are enacted by civilian lawmakers who may be so far removed from the process that they lose sight of what's good for humanity.

I was a victim of the Witch Hunts of the 1980s, I witnessed and adhered to Don't Ask, Don't Tell, and as a civilian I watched as the vile, discriminatory act completely dissolved in 2011. I retired from the military in 2007 after twenty-three years and had the pleasure of knowing and working with many fine gay service members. I felt honored that they would think so highly of me to introduce me to their girlfriends or boyfriends, confident that I would always keep their secret. I was also sad knowing they couldn't publicly acknowledge their love for one another for fear of retribution from their superiors. We all have to make our own way in this world. Although the lifestyle has never been mine, who am I to judge or say it is wrong for someone else to live it? Life is too short to worry about what other people are doing with their personal lives. As long as they are not hurting anyone, perform their jobs and are great Americans, does it matter?

