

The Board of Directors of Blue Alliance

*presents*



*A Celebration of Equality*

November 5, 2011

Doolittle Hall, USAFA, Colorado



Man's flight through life is sustained by the power of his knowledge.

*The Eagle and Fledglings, USAFA Terrazzo*

# High Flight

by John Gillespie Magee, Jr.

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth  
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;  
Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth  
Of sun-split clouds.  
And done a hundred things you have not dreamed of –  
Wheeled and soared and swung  
High in the sunlit silence.  
Hov'ring there, I've chased the shouting wind along  
And flung my eager craft through footless halls of air.  
Up, up the long, delirious burning blue,  
I've topped the windswept heights, with easy grace,  
Where never lark or even eagle flew.  
And while with silent, lifting mind I've trod,  
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,  
Put out my hand and touched the face of God.



## Blue Alliance Mission and Vision



Blue Alliance celebrates this vital time when the service of all Air Force personnel is recognized without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity. In recognition of our continuing mission to support our Academy, we have developed three initial mission statements for our organization.

- ▲ Facilitate peer support, professional networking, and mentorship among LGBT alumni of the US Air Force Academy.
- ▲ Promote respect, through education and advocacy, for LGBT individuals at the Air Force Academy, within the Academy's alumni community, and throughout the entire United States Air Force.
- ▲ Maintain a framework of safety that protects the privacy needs of each individual participant.

# Celebration of Equality

## Our Service and the Air Force Academy

In the following pages, we invite you to better understand the elements, values, and memories of our service and our relationships with the Air Force Academy. Built on our conjoined memories of the Front Range, we hereby link our service to the Academy itself and to the core values of the Air Force.

The values of Integrity, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All That We Do are essential to the character and leadership development of our Blue Alliance membership, cadets, and everyone in our Air Force.

## Excellence in All We Do: A Triple Threat

A "Triple Threat" at the Academy was a SAMI, In Ranks Inspection and then a Parade. I am what you might call the "Diversity Triple Threat" of the Academy, a gay, black female.

I can still remember as a 9 year old girl making a vow to attend the Air Force Academy because by then, girls will be able to go. You see, my father spent 23 years in the military, was in the first integrated unit, and went on to become one of the first black Chief Master Sergeants in the Air Force. Also, my oldest brother was a cadet in the class of 1974. There were so many connections I made to him. He was the oldest boy, I was the oldest girl. He was left handed. I am left handed.

I never knew prejudice or barriers growing up, but that's because I was raised with the notion that the color of my skin or being a girl didn't matter - all that mattered was who I was as a person and what I chose to make of myself. We lived diversity and opportunity every day based on my father's career in the Air Force.

But then the tragedy hit. December 20, 1970, during Christmas break of my brother's doolie year, he was killed in a car accident on I-25, north of Johnstown. It was devastating for my parents, and so much changed from there.

At 18, I was a freshman at Colorado State University, I pledged a sorority, made the women's basketball team, studied very little and partied a lot. I knew I needed some discipline in my life. I started looking at the service academies again. I got an appointment to West Point Class of 1984, or the Prep School at USAFA. Of course I chose the prep school - my brother was a preppie.

Prep school year was the year my sexuality came into question. I rationalized the relationship, as "special". I hated the word lesbian, it certainly didn't apply to me. That mindset allowed me to make it through and I did. What I didn't realize was what graduating from USAFA meant to my family until our actual graduation day. I completed the task my brother set out to do 16 years prior. I was the Air Force Officer in the Brown family that my father was so proud and respectful of. My Dad - The Chief - rendered my first salute. It gave me a different outlook on what I had just accomplished. The other struggles that I endured through those 5 years were overshadowed by what graduation meant to my father and my family.

My love for the Academy runs deep. I am proud of what I have accomplished in my life and the ALL of the experiences that I have had. Fortunately for me, I was able look beyond the senselessness of Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT), but I realize others have faced traumatic life changing events as a result of the policy. Having witnessed my father's success and overcoming the many challenges of integration in the military gives me faith that same will be true with the acceptance of gays in the military. My father told me of the difficult times he faced as a black man in the first integrated unit. There were many who told him he didn't belong and he was harassed because of the color of his skin. I know graduates have faced hard times because of their sexuality or their "presumed" sexuality. With the repeal of DADT I hope that those who have had hurtful experiences based on this law can now heal and carry the pride of their heritage and be anything they chose to be.

*Regina J. Brown, MD / USAFA Class of 1985*

**Service Before Self: Coming Up Higher**

A poem by Sydney Jewell:

Birds of the air have wings

And so have I.

On earth with the wings of the world

I tried to fly.

God from the height beholding

My heart's desire

Lent me the wings of heaven

To come up higher.

It was at the US Air Force Academy that I fell in love with flying and also developed a deep seeded need and desire to serve others. For many years however, I felt as though I was handicapped in my ability to serve because I am gay. Flying, indeed, the sky itself, provided me with a sense of home, of belonging. And while the sky will always be home, I am now able to serve freely, openly, honestly and fulfill “My heart’s desire,”—to empower others “To come up higher.”

*Cholene Espinoza | USAFA Class of 1985*

## Excellence in All We Do: My USAFA Family

It was an afternoon at USAFA when living under the newly instituted DADT policy first impacted my life. After seeing a friend of mine exit my cadet room in advance of the upcoming formation, a classmate pulled me aside and said, “Tara, you might want to be a little mindful of how often she comes around.” During that formation, for the first time as a Cadet Group Commander, I stood nervously, wondering if the 1,100 cadets staring back at me also suspected who I really was? Thankfully, no one challenged me from that point on and I graduated, with honors. With my path having been forged in brilliant USAFA Class of 1995 gold, my Air Force career shined brightly before me.

And, then, it got brighter. A USAFA friend soon introduced me to an amazing woman, Jenny, who was also serving in the Air Force and we established the foundation of a relationship with one another. But, by the time life sorted itself out and Jenny and I could begin building our life together, significant details had changed. Not only had Jenny decided to transition from the Air Force and I had been diagnosed with a debilitating disease, but my best friend during my USAFA years had turned us in under DADT. Life seemed anything but bright.

Except, then, in the midst of my most challenging life experience to date, it was USAFA that was suddenly there for me, helping me see the light at the end of what felt like a very dark tunnel. It was USAFA which helped me recognize that the current situation was only a present storm. And, it was USAFA which encircled me with the family, friends, and colleagues I needed as my wife and I transitioned from the Air Force and we began building a life together.

At my 10-year USAFA reunion, I had the honor of introducing Jenny as my wife to my classmates, most of whom were still active duty. What a beautiful day it was to feel the love, support, respect and inclusiveness my USAFA family extended to us, long before the consideration of repealing DADT. But, now that DADT has been repealed, I am so grateful that active duty personnel will no longer have to wait to feel that same acceptance that I think is inherent in the network of colleagues, friends, and family with whom we all have the honor of serving in our United States Air Force.

*Tara L. Sweeney | USAFA Class of 1995*  
Integrity: My Connection to USAFA



When I graduated in 1987, I literally looked at USAFA in my rear view mirror as I drove away and was relieved that I did not have to go back. I had 60 days leave and the pressure would be off until UPT. Little did I know that UPT and my career as a pilot would present even greater challenges and pressures. USAFA prepared me well to meet those days ahead. But there was always one thing that nothing could prepare me for and one thing that was my burden to bear alone. I was a gay cadet, I was a gay officer, and I was a gay Fighter Pilot. The enormous pressure to conform, to hide my true self and to always be just a little separated from my fellow cadets, officers, and fighter pilots was the greatest pressure of all. It was the main factor in my decision to leave the service that I truly loved.

Years after looking at USAFA in my rear view mirror, I returned. I have now come back many times and I have the same experience each time. In spite of the separation I felt from my fellow service members, I never felt separated from this place. I feel a deep connection here that I find hard to explain. The changes that this school made in me were profound. In many ways I feel as if I was born here. No Air Force policy and no amount of bigotry or hatred could change that. I belonged because I met the same challenges as all others. When I returned for my 20 year reunion, I was honest with my classmates for the first time about who I really was and it was liberating.

So, only one thing for me was missing. Full acceptance for all LGBT military personnel would finally allow all to serve with integrity and excellence in all that they do. When that day finally came, things changed. It may be too late for me to serve again but finally I no longer feel that separation from my fellow cadets, officers, and fighter pilots. I feel welcome here at Doolittle Hall. I walk the paths outside and weep for those that have fallen. I paint my face blue and cheer for the Falcons. These mountains, these buildings, these memorials, and these monuments always welcomed me back. And now finally the Air Force welcomes me back too.

*Greg Mooneyham / USAFA Class of 1987*

Service Before Self: These Lines Across My Face

"The Story" by Brandi Carlile starts,

"all of these lines across my face,  
tell you the story of who I am,  
so many stories of where I've been,  
and how I got to where I am,  
but these stories don't mean anything when you've got no one to tell them  
to . . ."

These lines resonate with me as I consider my story from the Academy and career in the Air Force. The lines in my face do show the pride, the joy, the fraternity and the sense of accomplishment in a mission complete. But the lines also show the hurt, the intense stress, the sadness and the sorrow. The dichotomy of being a good cadet, officer, pilot, leader and person was always in conflict with the policy that could never let me be COMPLETE in the Air Force.

I served my country for over 16 years trying to embody the core values of the Air Force every day - integrity, service before self and excellence in all that I did. It truly was service before self though, because in the end I saw that a policy ultimately compromised the very essence of who I was. In the end I had to have integrity with myself every day, because I was truly proud of who I was and who I loved and all of what we represented and offered our community and country.

I'm truly grateful and proud of my Academy and Air Force roots - it made for the best lines across my face - as it gave me my professional foundation and more important my best friend and life-long partner Regina. And now the lines show the smile across my face as the circle and mission is complete because everyone can serve with integrity and excellence in all they do and all of who they are.

*Tricia A. Heller | USAFA Class of 1987*

## Service Before Self:

The shame I felt in belonging to an institution that I was proud of, but if they ever truly knew me, I would be discharged, was tough. Somehow I rationalized that the people close to me, if they knew, would still accept me; but for national security, a political policy, and an ideal of troop strength and unit cohesion, we, in fact I, would have to tolerate the discrimination all the same. This I could handle, because as long as no one knew, it wasn't visibly directed at me. I lied to others to protect my career, but I also lied to myself to protect me from discrimination. Ultimately though, it was my peers and the Air Force that suffered the most.

I managed that shame and guilt for many decorated years of service, until I began a gay relationship. If being gay and in the military was tough, being in a gay relationship was even tougher. Forced at every turn to gender bend, pronoun switch, make excuses, and lie, amplified the shame. I was openly acknowledging I was gay in my private life, and I was forced to feel the discrimination of the institution and country I was proud of in my public life.

Faced with a tough decision, I decided to leave the military and try happiness on the outside. For me, looking back, it was the absolute right decision, especially under DADT. I was not yet capable of balancing a life that I could be both shameful and proud of. I never felt worthy of my accomplishments because I felt I wasn't worthy of the recognition from a country that could not acknowledge my service.

When I left the military I was greeted with comments from "Why did you hide from me, didn't you know you could trust me above the rhetoric of service" as well as "Really, Anton, I thought I knew you, and now I know I never really knew you, and that is tough for me" I felt a sadness because I let the rhetoric of an ideal determine my personal relationships.

Now, with the repeal of DADT, I am very happy. Though my decision would have remained the same, today it wouldn't have to. Today, YOU, our very proud Air Force young men and women *can* openly acknowledge your service as a part of the LGBT community and not feel the shame that I felt. You no longer have to lie. You can be who you are, and live your life on your terms. And though you may still encounter challenges, you will have a brighter and better future. And when you encounter those challenges I sincerely hope you reach to Blue Alliance, because in that way, we can continue to serve.

*Anton Novak / USAFA Class of 1993*

## Integrity: Integrity to the Core of Thy Self

I know the power of a secret. I lived with one since I was three without really understanding it. It was only in my 20s that I began to grasp it. This secret was with me constantly, taking up an immense amount of my consciousness and distracting me from the world around (although I only realized that in hindsight). The only time it left was during times of crisis - when I went into survival mode - such as my first six months at the Academy, or when my spouse of 10 years, Julie was diagnosed with a brain tumor and given a year to live.

The miracle was that Julie lived for almost 10 years, long enough for our son to reach his senior in high school. She passed and Tim went off to college, and I was finally in a position to begin to deal with this secret I had carried for 40 some years in a very public way; I started the transition from male to female.

The amazing thing was how natural it felt, how easy the transition was and how much energy and brain capacity I suddenly experienced. I hadn't realized until I was free to be me how much of my mental energy was going into keeping the secret. Hence, I have often wondered how much more I could have accomplished if I had been 'free to be sooner'. And while the ending of Don't Ask, Don't Tell would not have helped me, it has freed the thousands of my Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual colleagues who have served painfully and proudly in silence.

This isn't the life I thought I would be living, but I also know I'm the person I am because of this journey. It was only when I stopped living a lie that I could blossom into the person I was born to be.

## Excellence in All We Do: Living in a Fishbowl

I'm not sure what it would have been like to serve under DADT. I served in silence, and that stigma caused guilt, stress, frustration, and sadness. Deep down, I knew I was OK; a good person, a good leader, a respected officer, and a decorated instructor and combat pilot. But the policy and culture of the military at the time just seemed so foreign from how I felt emotionally when it came to relationships. It was a confusing time. I am not sure DADT would have been all that much different. You see, I was one of those individuals not afraid to admit I struggled with my sexuality for a long time - I don't think I wanted to believe it. This was mostly due to the environment I was raised in. Common story.

The older and more mature (wiser?) I became - the less narrow-minded I was. I loved the Air Force but I knew I had to leave. Going to graduate school helped. Meeting civilians helped even more. 99% of our country pays their taxes so the 1% in the military can defend their way of life. When I began to look around at what made this country what it is, I realized liberty was a key component in our diversity, and I had been living in a fishbowl.

Here were highly educated, respected, loving, law abiding citizens from all walks of life that happened to be gay. They were good people, regular people, people you could trust. These people became my friends and family. I finally realized that even my own opinions about gays and lesbians were misguided and false. I came straight from a conservative upbringing directly to the Academy. I thought my gayness was different, special, or somehow not the same. It wasn't. It was and is quite common, and quite frankly, not all that interesting. I am not defined by my sexual orientation, but by who I am and how I treat others.

The younger generations realize this - they are more than ready. It's those of us in the older generations that are the most uncomfortable - part of it is what we think we feel, part of it is what we have been taught, much of which is flat out wrong when it comes to gays and lesbians. Thank God enough people in a position of authority have finally realized it as well. To be sure, there will be implementation problems, as there are with any new policy. Bigots still exist, as do racists and misogynists. The military adapts and does just fine.

As a proud American that happens to be gay, let me promise you, flat out, one thing - Gay and Lesbian men and women will serve with dignity and honor, and will be as competent, decorated, brave and as highly respected as any other category or demographic of soldier. Many of us have spent our lives proving we can compete on any level if given the chance. Now that the yoke of guilt, suspicion, and silence has been removed - rest assured the country will be better off. I work quite well with my "straight" colleagues and friends in the "real" world. It will be no different.

I hope commanders will seek out the gay troops in their midst and get to know them. I would expect they treat them no differently than anyone else - only with dignity and respect. It will be no surprise at how "normal" these fighting men and women really are. You can trust them with your life. I hazard to guess that some of the best people will turn out to be gay. It will come as no surprise to me.

*Jeff Breininger / USAFA Class of 1985*

**Integrity: To Thy Own Self Be True**

In celebrating the repeal of DADT I find myself thinking about what it meant for me to graduate from the academy and to serve in the USAF. It is only now that I can come to terms with my unfortunate past that was potholed with insecurity, isolation, bullying, self-doubt, and at times, insanity. I am a gay black man.

Sadly for me, I believed incorrectly that no one knew my “T”. I was the guy the athletes in my basic squadron made fun of, my classmates ostracized, the sophomores relentlessly trained, the juniors ignored, and the seniors labeled a “non-team player.” Being young and immature, my only defense against this hostility was to go inside myself and put up blocks and walls that only further fueled this sad firestorm. I did not handle those times as well as I should have. However, as the saying goes, “this too shall pass!” and it did!

There were guardian angels who helped me when I could no longer help myself. There was a General who looked out for me from on high; there was a substantial LGBT group of cadets, instructors, and COS area NCOs linked together that provided a much needed helping hand to restore me whenever possible. Perhaps the most important person in my life was my “unofficial sponsor” John Prentice '82. He guided my neglected character and leadership development, as well as introduced me to the beginnings of my adult LGBT life. In this life I have now found serenity, love, self-respect, kindness, professional success, and above all the truest meaning of service before self.

I share my experience, my hope, and strength so that you may know you are not alone and deserve to take your place in the long blue line. Our future now lies in your hands. If there is anything you need, we Blue Alliance members are here to help. It is our singular purpose as graduates to help you in your journey to fulfill your promise as leaders in the military as well as in your own worlds that you will create.

To thy own self be true and the rest will follow.

*Paul Sanders / USAFA Class of 1995*

**Excellence in All We Do: Disappearing into the Crowd**

My mother lived her life by a simple credo: “Fools names and faces appear in public places.” She taught my siblings and me to let our actions speak for us. As

with most of her lessons, Mom's values made a difference during every day I spent at the Zoo and in every interaction I had in the Air Force.

As a doolie, I'd tried to hide from the fact that every person at USAFA knew and liked my brother, Bobby '81. By my two-degree year, I found myself hiding in plain sight. I'd learned the lesson from Basic Cadet Training: Don't be at the front of any line. Don't be at the back either! My most vivid memory of school was of a lone walk across the Terrazzo in the wind and snow, not of friends or fun. While my class was celebrating our last night before our service commitment took effect, I realized why I wasn't like anyone around me. My initial reaction was one of fear. Then, on Mom's example, I became resolute that "that" won't define me. I convinced myself that I could manage this and any other challenge, giving not a single thought to the fact that "that" could get me bounced from the Academy and the Air Force.

After the med-board removed me from Pilot Training, I found that I civilianized my language. I spoke to people about my experiences in 'college,' replaced 'doolie' with 'freshman,' and rarely referenced that I'd graduated from a service academy. Without realizing it, I'd removed all plural pronouns from my lexicon, merely referencing that, for example, I'd gone on vacation despite the friends and boyfriends with whom I'd actually gone. My only remaining contacts to my alma mater were the unsinkable Gina Brown '85 and ever-stalwart Trish Heller '87.

These two friends invited me out of my self-imposed exile and allowed me to recognize my deep commitment to the Academy and to the amazing people I'd known there. I had been convinced when I went to my 20<sup>th</sup> reunion no one would remember me.

Agreeing to attend my 20<sup>th</sup> reunion with me and my partner, John, Gina and Trish made my homecoming one of heartfelt pride. While I was asked various times if I'd actually graduated with '84, I also found in myself a desire to rekindle those few friendships that had been so important to me as I sought to get comfortable in my own skin. The distance I'd built between me and the Academy had been unnecessary. I am both successful and a proud USAFA grad.

September 20, 2011, represented to me a day when I could quietly say to myself: "my service mattered." I look forward to a strong, respectful, and affirming relationship with the place that taught me who I am.

As a man who has over 1,500 unique contacts in my address book, of which less than 50 are Academy related, I have a long way to go in reaching out to USAFA to make my service fully matter. I welcome the new challenge!

*Karl Alvarez | USAFA Class of 1984*

*From The Ramparts*

From the ramparts we will go into the sky,  
Far away from comrades here.

To whatever fate may bring:  
Fame, or Glory, even Death.

But no matter what may come,  
Life is better, purpose more, honor bright

Because 'twas here we first beheld,  
What greater thing could be.

“a Proposed Hymn for the Cadet Wing”  
Clifton Williams, March 1965

## One More Roll

*Commander Jerry Coffee, Hanoi, 1968*



We toast our hearty comrades, who have fallen from the sky,  
And were gently caught by God's own hand to be with him on high.

To dwell among the soaring clouds they knew so well before,

From tail-chase to victory roll at heaven's very door.

As we fly among them there, we're sure to heed their plea:

Take care, my friend, watch your six, and do one more roll just for me.

# Bring Me Men!

Bring me men to match my mountains,  
Bring me men to match my plains,  
Men with empires in their purpose,  
And new eras in their brains.

Bring me men to match my mountains,  
Bring me men to match my plains;  
Men to chart a starry empire,  
Men to make celestial claims.

Bring me men to match my prairies,  
Men to match my inland seas;  
Men to sail beyond my oceans,  
Reaching for the galaxies.

These are men to build a nation,  
Join the mountains to the sky;  
Men of faith and inspiration,  
Bring me men, bring me men, bring me men!

Bring me men to match my forests,  
Bring me men to match my shore;  
Men to guard the mighty ramparts,  
Men to stand at freedom's door.

Bring me men to match my mountains,  
Men to match their majesty;  
Men to climb beyond their summits,  
Searching for their destiny.

# Evening's Agenda

Drinks	5:30pm to 6:30pm
Call to Take Seats	6:30pm
Welcome / Introductions	6:30pm to 7:00pm
Main Course	7:00pm to 7:45pm
Blue Alliance "Our Chartered Role"	7:45pm to 7:50pm
Dr. Adis Vila on USAFA Implementation	7:50pm to 8:10pm
Membership Discussion	8:10pm to 8:30pm
Blue Alliance "A Continuing Mission"	8:30pm to 8:45pm
Membership Caucus	8:45pm to 8:55pm
Closure / "One More Roll"	8:55pm to 9:00pm



....Blue Alliance: *A Continuing Mission!*